

# PLAYING PLACE

BOARD GAMES, POPULAR CULTURE, SPACE

EDITED BY CHAD RANDL AND D. MEDINA LASANSKY





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Board Games, Popular Culture, Space

edited by Chad Randl and D. Medina Lasansky

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# Introduction

Chad Randl and D. Medina Lasansky

The amusements of mankind have always been a fascinating study, and whoever has the leisure to trace their development from age to age will find the story grows more interesting with every new chapter.

—Milton Bradley, 1896

Descending into the Strong National Museum of Play archive was like entering into a game-playing historian's dreamscape.<sup>1</sup> Rows of mobile storage racks with shelf upon shelf stacked with board games—the colorful titles on their box sides calling out for attention. Dozens of versions of *Monopoly*, *Life*, and *Clue*. Games recalled from childhood that had not been seen or thought of since. Many never heard of. We had come to the museum in Rochester, New York, to explore doing a book on how board games represented place, architecture, landscape, and building history. As we wandered the Strong's seemingly endless collection, we knew the project was possible, important, and daunting.

For a decade, Medina has taught a course at Cornell called Archi.Pop, in which students develop a more nuanced understanding of architecture's cultural import through a range of sources including advertisements, dollhouses, and James Bond films. A book on board games would provide new readings for students in that course to complement her 2014 book that shared the course title. Chad has been a board gamer since Danish friends introduced him to *Settlers of Catan* in 2003. His interest (and his game collection) grew over the years, sparked in part by an appreciation for how board games engaged with historical and architectural subjects.

The museum was established in the early 1980s based on the toy and game collections of Margaret Strong. Since then, its archive has grown to around twenty-nine thousand games, from a four-hundred-year-old Japanese game board, *The Genpei War*, to recently released titles. Guided by the curators over several visits, we came across game after game with themes relevant to the project. To cover as many as possible—and inspired by new models for short-form scholarly writing and our playful subject matter—we opted for a series of concise essays authored by writers from diverse backgrounds.<sup>2</sup> The result is this anthology, which starts to explore what board games, past and present, tell us about larger place-based cultural attitudes, assumptions, and anxieties.

Figure 0.1: Game archive at the Strong National Museum of Play.

*Playing Place* is the first book to situate board games within a larger framework marked by two points of focus: (1) the way board games are embedded in and reflect popular culture, and (2) the various facets of place (architectural and urban design and history, heritage conservation, landscape history, etc.) that board games address. Even a cursory review of tabletop games from classics like *Clue* to Eurogames like *Carcassonne* reveals a thick interaction with place and spatial concepts. Boards depict floor plans and maps, streetscapes, facades, and trade networks. Game mechanics (the frameworks guiding interaction between players and games) have players designing and constructing buildings and buying and selling properties. Players move cars on roads, deliver goods, inhabit homes, and contest terrain. Progress toward victory is measured through movement from one locale to more rewarding ones; winners have the most valuable territories or the most interconnections. Players take on the role of landlord, property owner, shopper, architect, developer, manorial lord, farmer, soldier, queen. Assuming these personae, players reenact existing contemporary or historical interpretations or, alternately, challenge them, upend them, and test alternative trajectories. House rules, player-authored variants, and the social dynamics of the game session disregard game designers' intent and create new ways of playing and understanding the past. *Playing Place* uncovers connections between game space and the real world. It argues that closely reading tabletop games can enhance our understandings of games as cultural artifacts and play as a process that reflects (and even shapes) popular conceptions of the built environment.

## Our Subject

As Maile Hutterer and other contributors note, board games have been around for millennia. A commercial market arose in the latter half of the nineteenth century, led by two American gaming giants, Milton Bradley and George S. Parker. It saw an upswing in sales during the Great Depression, when games provided inexpensive entertainment for cash-strapped families, and *Monopoly*'s enormous success lifted the entire industry. Another boom accompanied the post-World War II era, buoyed by a general economic expansion and increased discretionary income and leisure time. Proprietors responded by remodeling toy departments and hobby shops to accommodate the growing number and variety of games on offer.<sup>3</sup> The board game market proved resilient to subsequent economic downturns, though the advent of electronic games in the 1980s cast doubt on traditional games' long-term viability.<sup>4</sup>

Today, board games are experiencing a renaissance of popular interest and commercial success. Prompted by the development of Euro-style tabletop games in the 1990s, the revival has since expanded to include worldwide interest, especially by millennial consumers, in everything from collectible card and dice games to role-playing games with miniatures.<sup>5</sup> Analysts predict that the board



Figure 0.2: Playing *Risk* at The Uncommons, a board game café in Manhattan, in 2021.

game market will continue to grow more than 8 percent annually, reaching \$21 billion by 2025. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and other media sources touted board games as an appealing means to survive stay-at-home orders and for health-care workers to de-stress after long shifts treating coronavirus patients.<sup>6</sup>

The days when retail chains carried only variations on blockbuster games by major manufacturers have been superseded by the appearance of specialty game shops, expanded game shelf space at Target and Walmart, and game bars and cafés stocking a huge range of games for kids and adults. Board games are prescribed as popular antidotes for a cultural environment dominated by screen media and for people seeking face-to-face interaction. Websites like BoardGameGeek and review channels on YouTube provide information on the latest releases and serve as a community resource for sharing play tips, recommendations, and player-designed modifications.

While the endurance of the tabletop game as a form of play and the expansion of the board game market are significant, they are not prerequisites for studying board games. Pedigreed games and million-copy sellers are not the only legitimate sources for understanding the gaming past. As historians (of science and technology, consumerism, and pop culture) have shown, one-off prototypes that never make it into production, fizzled initiatives, and user-modified variants all constitute valid subjects for understanding the evolution of historical ideas and states of thought at the time of their creation.<sup>7</sup> *Playing Place* treats with equal regard some of the most famous and least familiar games.



The book's contributors, representing diverse disciplines and perspectives, ask questions including: How do tabletop games intentionally or incidentally promote normative or nostalgic ideas about housing, urban planning, or processes of design? How do games reinforce consumerism and the canon of iconic buildings? How do they articulate spatial frameworks of nationality, race, and community? How might games reveal collective concerns about changing environments and ways of functioning within those environments? How might game history and games themselves aid instructors in introducing histories of architecture, collaborative design, or place-based heritage? The authors consider the ways board games reify the priorities, preoccupations, and interests of the larger world in which they exist. Drawing on a range of methodologies and sources, their essays examine reflective and refractive relationships between board games and their designers, producers, promoters, and consumers, as well their mediation by television programs (in essays by Lynn Spigel and Marco Arnaudo), movies (in Justin Fowler's piece), literature, the internet, and social media.

## Game Types

For most, the term "board game" evokes classic titles like *Monopoly*, *Risk*, *Scrabble*, and *Life* with sales figures in the tens of millions. Manufacturers have released successive editions and spin-offs of these "staple" games in dozens of languages in a multitude of countries.<sup>8</sup> Staple games, widely recognized (even by the game averse), have dominated the mass market for over a century and are still the mainstay of producers such as Hasbro (successor to both Milton Bradley and Parker Brothers). They are still what you are most likely to find in a game cabinet or closet.<sup>9</sup> Essays by Andrew Shanken, Medina Lasansky, Athanasios Geolas, and others undertake new readings of such board games, situating them in architectural, geopolitical, social, and popular-cultural history.

"Promotional games" are more trendy and ephemeral than staple games. Released by both major producers and smaller (sometimes ad hoc) companies, they were often the brainchild of an inventor or entrepreneur seeking to capitalize on the popularity of a particular cultural moment. Promotional games often incorporated novel, catchy components, actions, or features intended to "shake up" the conventional play experience. They typically required intensive advertising campaigns to introduce them to consumers and were not expected to demonstrate sustained, long-term sales. Some had an explicitly didactic intent to educate consumers about a topical issue, convince an audience of the rightness of a cause, or critique a political position. Others were the product of tie-in licensing deals for a film or television program, toy, or amusement park. Essays by Alice Friedman, Trudi Sandmeier, Abigail Van Slyck, and others feature such promotional tabletop games. Mostly long out of print and forgotten, these





Figure 0.3: Game closet depicted in the 2001 film *The Royal Tenenbaums*.

second-tier games remain important artifacts and documents marking the rise and fall of popular tastes, marketing strategies, cultural priorities, and obsessions from the period they were produced.

Our contributors also address a third type of board game, commonly known as “Eurogames.” Originally developed by designers from Germany and other European countries in the 1990s, Euros emerged as an alternative to conflict-based, winner-take-all, mass-market American board games. Although Eurogames feature myriad themes, mechanics, and rules, they generally exhibit a set of common design elements: they are usually themed, with boards and playing pieces that evoke a particular moment in time, with players taking on particular characters or roles in specific geographic settings; player elimination is rare; most include a “catch-up” mechanic that limits opportunities for any one player to develop an insurmountable lead; and scoring is often only revealed at the game’s end to increase tension and reduce predictability. According to Stewart Woods, “The eurogame design movement [has] a distinct and recognizable sensibility that highlights construction, development and comparative achievement over conflict.”<sup>10</sup> Today these shared characteristics, rather than national origins or any predominant theme, define Eurogames. Though similar games existed before, it was the explosive popularity of Klaus Teuber’s 1995 *Settlers of Catan* (rebranded as *Catan* in 2015), explored by Mark Morris in this book, that pushed Eurogames from a relatively niche to a mass-market phenomenon, first in Europe and then in North America and worldwide.

Because definitions of gaming and place and space are ambiguous (and sometimes disputed), and because representational qualities of play and games are more important to the project than their procedural rhetoric, *Playing Place* is intentionally loose with its subject matter and approach. Some essays address a single game or genre; some group together multiple games with related themes; some authors focus on what is depicted on the game board, others on the pieces

or boxes; many take up games played on tabletops; others explore board game-inspired play extending across real cities.

The essays are also not limited to one historical frame. Contemporary historical games (those currently or recently in production that are set in the past), historic historical games (those produced in the past, depicting an even earlier past), and games that have become historical (those designed and produced in the past on what were then contemporary subjects) are all the subjects of essays here. What unites the games examined in this book is their construction of emergent, goal-oriented narratives that situate players in worlds reflecting the human experience past and present, real and imagined.

This catholic approach is matched by an equally broad range of voices represented in the collection. Rather than constrain our authors with proscriptions from the outset or remold each submitted essay to speak in a uniform register, we have let stand the individual cadences of our contributors and limited the tendency to standardize. This acknowledges the way readers (both academic ones and those reading for pleasure) engage with anthologies: by skipping between subjects of greatest curiosity. As we did not seek authors from one disciplinary home, so we do not assume one background or set of interests for our readers (beyond the broadest themes of playing and place).

## Place and Space Themes

Research on play and games is replete with spatial and place-based associations. Johan Huizinga, an early scholar of play, linked it explicitly to a spatial imaginary. His metaphor of the "Magic Circle"—as a "play-ground," an immersive, temporary realm, where social rank is forgotten, where the rules of the game are sacred, and where players can lose themselves in the beautiful order of play—has prompted extensive debate over the nature of games and play and the degree to which they are a part of or apart from the real world.<sup>11</sup> Board games contain multiple spatial configurations. There is the space in which the game is set (the represented space depicted and bounded by the game board and its components); this is either themed or abstracted. There is the physical space (kitchen table, game café, seatback tray, school classroom and desk) in which players gather to undertake play. Finally, there is the social space of the game, the set of relationships necessary for the game's theme and mechanics to work—in other words, the socially constituted environment around the game in which the arrangement of pieces on the board indicates a particular game state (who is winning, how far along the game is) as established by a set of rules that all players agree to follow.

Games are rule-based spatial platforms; rules enable play and are, by definition, restrictive. A board game in which every player moved concurrently and all players could move any number of pieces, any number of spaces, every turn



would not be much fun to play. In his book *Grand Urban Rules*, Alex Lehnerer notes that “rules have a bad reputation. Architects in particular are not terribly fond of them. In the form of building laws, they count as primary determinants, and are often conceived as nothing but constraints on artistic creativity.” Lehnerer concedes that rules are a necessary precondition for games, but “urban design is no game. Still (and without attempting to elaborate on the distinctions between building regulations and game rules) it can be said that there are good and bad regulations, those that restrict freedom of movement, and those that actually generate it in the first place.”<sup>12</sup> Essays by our contributors Rowan Tulloch, David Salomon, José Zagal, Maurice Suckling, and others take up the spatial logics—means of movement, methods of opening and closing access, processes of containment and spatial conquest—that underpin both abstract board games and themed ones. These authors, as well as others in the book, identify the ways that game rule sets enable play to proceed but do so in a manner that is not so scripted and foreordained as to eliminate the pleasurable uncertainty that makes for a fulfilling play experience: restricting movement enough to make the game viable, but not so strict that a player feels powerless to shape the narrative.

Place emphasizes the meanings attached by individuals and communities to geographic or built locales.<sup>13</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan notes that “enclosed and humanized space is place.”<sup>14</sup> It scales from the individually inhabited spot to the room and structure, neighborhood and city, landscape, nation, and beyond. Place is a means to move beyond an art-historical approach that has traditionally underpinned architectural history and historic preservation, one that privileged architectural form and aesthetic connoisseurship over more everyday environments and the experience of inhabitation. Place is constituted by and derives meaning from individual, social, and cultural forces, and thus it elevates the significance of the ordinary. Finally, place transcends disciplinary boundaries and facilitates interaction between scholars of urban sociology, architectural history, environmental psychology, and historic preservation, among other fields.<sup>15</sup> Every essay in this collection engages with place as outlined; the authors’ varied approaches match the many facets of the term. Essays by Elizabeth LaPensée and Kenekwue Ogbuagu both explore how games reflect the coalescence of community identity through place attachment: for LaPensée, to a landscape that provides both nourishment and spiritual meaning; and for Ogbuagu, to the shared experience of traversing a country’s road network.

Place is most clearly manifest in a board game’s theme. A game’s theme is its backstory, the temporal and spatially oriented immersive engine that presents players with specific roles and motivations. It is the stage, as well as the props, costumes, backdrops, and write-up in the playbill, that grounds the game in a particular time and place. Like digital games, board games can be considered “themed spaces” that “share many similarities to other themed locations, such as

fast-food restaurants and theme parks.”<sup>16</sup> Theme is articulated in a board game’s title, the box art, the text describing the game on the box, and the expository information in the rules. It is carried through in the board art, tokens, and other playing components (individual player mats, currencies, chits), as well as game mechanics and character actions—builders build things, merchants sell things. Whether lightly connected to an abstract game or deeply embedded in every phase of gameplay, themes can prompt further discussion and study of a subject, historical or contemporary. The BoardGameGeek website has numerous posts and reader-contributed “GeekLists” that guide players interested in a particular game theme toward relevant books, films, and other media.

One of the most common board game critiques (especially for Eurogames) is that a theme seems “pasted on” with no relationship to the actions players take and no bearing on how the winner is determined (also referred to as the game’s “victory conditions”). In these cases, the core game consists of actions that would function identically regardless of the theme layered over them. As in architectural debates about the honest use of materials and the morality of ornament, some game critics consider pasted-on themes deceitful. One critic argues that “the wholesale grafting of a theme onto a set of mechanics is dishonest if those mechanics have no real-world connection to the theme.” Referring to the many games that depict tower and building construction, the critic asks, “Is it realistic to simply add floors to an existing skyscraper?”<sup>17</sup>

Staple games, promotional games, Eurogames—all may take up place, design, architecture, and construction in their themes, their gameplay, or both. As the movement of tokens from starting points to finish lines constitutes so many game experiences, it is no wonder that designers often rely on spatial mechanics and place representations to regulate that movement and depict a setting in which those pieces, their movements, and their motives are embedded. Innumerable game boards feature landscapes traversed by paths and roads (*Candyland*, 1949), building floor plans with rooms connected by thresholds and halls (*Clue*, 1949; *Betrayal at House on the Hill*, 2004), and urban grids with blocks of buildings bisected by streets and intersections (*Urban Sprawl*, 2011). Progress is impeded by landing on undesirable locales; victory is hastened by shortcuts and privileged knowledge. The values of spaces on the board fluctuate based on adjacent developments. Borders and pathways divide and connect neighboring locales. More points are gained by constructing more elaborate monuments or, as in the popular Eurogame *Agricola* (2007), transitioning your farm family’s dwelling from a wooden house to one made of clay and ultimately one made of stone.

When leading a board game company in the 1970s, the designer Philip Orbanes identified themes that tested well during market research, including construction, mining, smuggling luxury items, earthquakes, fast-food franchises, world conquest, and wilderness adventure.<sup>18</sup> Among the twenty-four thematic





Figure 0.4: The three house types in *Agricola*.

goals Stewart Woods listed in his book on Eurogames, building is among the most common (along with accumulating wealth).<sup>19</sup> Explaining the popularity of this game trope, the designer Matt Leacock notes: "It's generally understood that buildings have some sort of construction cost, take up a certain amount of space, and (like a person) perform some sort of function. All of these things fit especially well in Eurogames which often have players converting one sort of resource into another type of resource in pursuit of a larger goal."<sup>20</sup> Most directly, games position players as homeowners, architects, city planners, or mayors, charged with determining the built form of an imagined structure or entire community. The 1947 game *Let's Furnish a House* had early post-World War II players (with deferred dreams of homeownership and an eagerness to return to normal) fitting out ideal homes to match their interests and tastes.<sup>21</sup> The first game in the *Welcome to* series (which has the subtitle . . . *Your Perfect Home*) from 2018 invites players to "become an architect in America during the 1950s and build the best neighborhood in town."<sup>22</sup>

The connection between place and board games is perhaps most deeply etched into the public consciousness through the enduringly popular *Monopoly*. The story of its roots as a didactic game intended to reveal the bad side of property leasing by Lizzie Magie in the nineteenth century has frequently been told.<sup>23</sup> *Monopoly's* representation of Atlantic City, New Jersey, real estate is one of the clearest, and by far the most famous, examples of how physical worlds and game worlds converge. With the game's renown and cultural potency, it comes as no surprise that local entrepreneurs, boosters, and fund-raisers have adapted *Monopoly's* setting for hundreds if not thousands of other real-world places in variants from *Santa Clarita-opoly* to *Cracker Barrel-opoly*. The Friends of the Somers [Connecticut] Public Library, for example, created *Somersopoly* in the 1980s, with local streets and businesses standing in for those in the original. In exchange for a contribution to the library, proprietors could have their firm represented on the game board. The proceeds from game sales were also donated to the library.<sup>24</sup>

Figure 0.5: The game box for *Welcome to . . . Your Perfect Home*.



*Monopoly's* presence in global culture is huge, and its imbrication in varied historical episodes is widespread. Fascist Italy produced *Monopoli*, which promoted the Mussolini regime's policy of economic self-sufficiency.<sup>25</sup> In 1943, Oswald Poeck produced a handmade underground version while in the Theresienstadt ghetto, replacing Park Place, Boardwalk, and other properties in the original with spaces marking the ghetto's barracks, prison, deportees' absorption site, and others.<sup>26</sup> *Monopoly* is the game against which others are compared, and it is referenced later in this introduction, and again in the conclusion. Essays by Jennifer Minner, Samia Henni, and Dianne Harris in this volume highlight cases where designers co-opted, and sometimes subverted, the game's framing of property acquisition, tenant-landlord relationships, and land speculation, often for quite different ends.

Perhaps partly due to *Monopoly's* dominance, games about real estate development, land ownership, and the boom-and-bust cycles of property valuation



are among the most common in the industry. Though less known than *Monopoly*, *Acquire*, by the game design legend Sid Sackson, has participants building hotel chains, merging them, and trading stock certificates in the expanding corporations. Continuously in print since 1964, the game has been marketed to “all who like the feeling of power that comes with great acquisitions.”<sup>27</sup> It is a tag line that would be equally apt for the game Whitten Overby covers in this collection.



Figure 0.6: Board and components for the Fascist-era game *Monopoli*.

Innumerable examples confirm the strong compulsion to play at getting rich through land development and resource exploitation. The 1897 game *Going to Klondike* offered players a chance to stake claims and secure nuggets, participating vicariously in the gold rush from the safety and warmth of their homes. Milton Bradley's *Square Mile* (1962) and *Prize Property* (1974) have players developing land for the twin goals of profit and community building. Emily Blair's essay examines a game about the early postwar uranium prospecting fad that offered personal enrichment and patriotic expression. A string of games centered on extractive industries, from the *Game of Oil* (1939) to *Strike it Rich: The Make a Million Game of Mining* (1976). Two that appeared during the 1970s energy crisis, *Offshore Oil Strike* (1973) and *King Oil* (1974), capitalized on Western culture's worries about global petroleum supplies and interest in the wealth to be accrued by securing it.

Even with more than thirty-five essays, *Playing Place* only scratches the surface of games that incorporate themes, issues, and representations of place. Entire genres of relevant board games are not covered and await further study. Although Bob Brier's piece treats games about ancient Egypt, there are hundreds of other games with architectural and place-based elements set in the classical world, including Greece (*Acropolis of Athens: Following the Steps of Pausanias*, 2010), Rome (*The Architects of the Colosseum*, 2016; *The Downfall of Pompeii*, 2004), Mesopotamia (*Tigris & Euphrates*, 1997), India (*Maharaja: The Game*

Figure 0.7: Game box for the 1974 game *King Oil*, showing a landscape of playful resource extraction.







Figure 0.8: Game box for the 2019 game *Yin Yang*.

of *Palace Building in India*, 2004, reimplemented in 2021), and *China* (*Yin Yang*, 2019; *Spring and Autumn: Story of China*, 2023). Relevant games with postclassical and early modern themes also run into the many hundreds, from *Alhambra* (2003) and *Saint Petersburg* (2004) to *Queen's Architect* (2015) and *Architects of the West Kingdom* (2018).

One of the earliest board games manufactured in the United States was the 1822 *Traveller's Tour through the United States*, and geography and travel games like it have been a mainstay ever since.<sup>28</sup> They gained a new appeal with the increase in automobile ownership and expanding road networks in the twentieth century. Indeed, driving games chart the evolving obsession with cars and the conditions emerging from their ubiquity on the American landscape. *Auto-Tag*, the *Highway Game* (1930) and *Interstate Highway* took up the development of successive generations of limited-access highways; *Traffic* (1940) and *Rush Hour* (1982) deal with road congestion; *That's Truckin'* (1976) covers its era's fascination with long-haul trucking; and a series of *Blizzard of '77 Travel Games* enabled players to relive attempts to navigate snow-choked streets in different midwestern cities after that winter's record snowstorms.<sup>29</sup>

Train games have obvious connections to landscape, travel, and economic history. The popular and accessible *Ticket to Ride* franchise started in 2004 and now has almost thirty official stand-alone versions and expansions, most set around the turn of the twentieth century. Deeper economic simulations are offered in the 18xx series, such as *1830: Railways & Robber Barons* (1986), with each game depicting a different year and location of railway development. Between these two sit many other railroad-building and freight-delivery games, including *Age of Steam* (2002) and *Railways of the World* (2005).<sup>30</sup> Industrial and infrastructure games such as *Power Grid* (2004), *Brass* (2007), and *Furnace* (2021), civilization-building games, trade games, even games about imagined future settlements beyond Earth, all evince cultural thinking about the human interaction with place and deserve further examination.

Games that incorporate tactile construction literally enact their themes. Building dexterity games are expressly physical forms of emergent play, where the game board or object grows as the game progresses. Such games combine both the creative building aspects of construction toy sets like Erector (1913), Tinkertoy (1914), Lincoln Logs (1916), and Lego (introduced in the 1930s) with simpler games that test hand-eye coordination such as *Pick-Up Stix*, *Crokinole* (both dating to the mid-nineteenth century), and *Shoot the Moon* (1950s).<sup>31</sup> Building dexterity games are different from building blocks or construction toys in that the former typically have objectives beyond the erection of an attractive, stable edifice. In games such as *Blockhead* (1954), *Bausack* (1987), *Villa Paletti* (2001), and *Menara* (2018), the delicate placement of block on block, the fitting of piece into piece, produces a structure that resists gravity. *Jenga* (1983) and games like it reverse the process, beginning with a complete structure and ending in its collapse. In building dexterity games, the pleasure is often in the push-your-luck tension of building a bit too precariously, teetering anticipation, and the thrilling moment of destruction.





Figure 0.9: Player-constructed temple in the game *Menara*.

## Tactile Components

Touch and haptic interactions of players and pieces are not just important to dexterity games. All tabletop games are tactile things. Players move tokens from one space to another on the board, pick up and discard cards, track their progress on score sheets, and hand money or other items to their opponents. Physical components are essential to the experience of every game addressed in this book. Laid out on the table and manipulated to move the game along, components erase the world beyond and draw the player in. As the game scholar Ian Bogost has noted:

Like any craft object, a board or card game can create different levels of physical attachment. The design of *Monopoly*, with its modernist typography, winsome illustrations, and forged tokens creates a game of material appeal, one that produces pleasure in the holding, viewing, and possessing as well as in the playing. *Monopoly* becomes a place we want to go back to.<sup>32</sup>

George Parker won market share for his company in the twentieth century by insisting on high-quality components. Thinking back on the game-buying and playing habits of his youth in the 1960s, game designer Philip Orbanes noted that “it seemed we could enjoy a game, even if it wasn’t so great to play, if its pieces were nice and fun to handle.”<sup>33</sup> Part of the allure of Eurogames is their high production values and the quality of their components relative to earlier board games.

Sensuous appeals to touch explain why many prefer physical over electronic implementations of board games. To Ian Bogost, online versions of the ancient game Go pale in comparison to the experience of setting black and white stones onto the wooden board. "The black and white often have a different texture from one another, depending on the type and quality of stones one uses. The feel and weight of them between the fingers somehow aids the pondering that comes with their placement."<sup>34</sup> The three-dimensional and operable Rube Goldberg-type device that players construct (with plastic bathtub, plumbing, light post, and other materials) to win *Mouse Trap* has proven so popular that the game remains in print sixty years after its introduction. Who would want to play it on an app?

Three-dimensional components tie board games explicitly to the architectural: crenellated rooks anchoring the four corners of the chess board, green houses, red hotels. *The Game of Life's* injection-molded plastic buildings facilitate a more vivid imagining of the built environment in which the narrative transpires. Their white color contributes to their role as generic stand-ins for all buildings. Innumerable other games feature architectural components associated with the game's theme and objectives; *Chartered: The Golden Age* (2019), *Era: Medieval Age* (2019), and *Tapestry* (2019) are a few recent examples. When a game is successful enough to warrant a reprint, later editions may feature three-dimensional representations of structures that were originally depicted on flat tokens. To commemorate *Catan's* tenth anniversary, the game's publisher released a 3D collector's edition with hand-painted resin tiles, settlements, walls, and other components. Of *Acquire's* many versions, the most prized is the 1990



Figure 0.10: 3D-printed plastic structures for the game *Cities: Skylines*.



edition in which the hotel chains are represented not by flat tiles but by colorful 3D plastic skyscrapers. All the buildings in the initial release of the city-building game *Cities: Skylines* were represented on two-dimensional chits. The designer, Rustan Håkansson, later developed 3D printer files for the buildings and posted them for free download on BoardGameGeek.

## Games and Authorship

Like architecture, board games are usually the result of collaborative effort. Designers are supported by developers, advisers, and a team of play testers who seek out unbeatable strategies, lulls, and dead ends; clarify rules; and streamline gameplay. Publishers and their sales and marketing staff may have a say in the game's theme, components, and even its title. Graphic designers and art directors come up with the game's visual identity and box art most likely to further sales. As with all forms of cultural production, new games build on earlier game mechanics and conventions, even if they introduce seemingly revolutionary new elements.

Players continue to engage games through various forms of distributed creativity. When a game is especially loved, crafty owners may “pimp out” their copy with homemade elaborations of the board and components using cardboard, balsa, polymer clay, and 3D-printed pieces. Fans design tuck boxes for cards and box partitions to more easily sort and store pieces. They construct custom “dice towers”—boxes into which dice are tossed to ensure a random result—that often reinforce a game's theme. When a game features buildings,



Figure 0.11: Game board, 3D buildings, and cards for *Chartered: The Golden Age*.



Figure 0.12: Dice, plastic structures, and player mat from the 2019 game *Era: Medieval Age*.



Figure 0.13: Game board and 3D buildings from the 2019 game *Tapestry*.

they are often a favored component to upgrade. *Acquire* players have designed and built custom hotel structures; fans of *Agricola* have made their own barns, fields, and crops.

Players exert agency in myriad other ways. They establish house rules that adjust the game to the group's liking—lengthening (or more commonly) shortening its play time, making it harder or easier to play. The most famous of these (and one not even recognized as a house rule by many players) is the awarding of \$200 to players landing on the “Free Parking” corner spot in *Monopoly*. Player autonomy is evident when players use pieces from one game in another, make up a new game with the pieces from an existing one, cheat, quit early, let someone continue after being eliminated, or offer “do-overs” for the sake of fun and sociability. Finally, players modify their games by adjusting the theme or updating events to accommodate historical developments that follow a game's release. Variant designers may share their new rule sets and print-and-play modifications through the file sections on BoardGameGeek or other gaming websites. Game publishers occasionally sanction these mods, publishing them officially or incorporating them into future editions. For example, in 2020, the game magazine *C3i* published a COVID-inspired variant for the cooperative game *Pandemic*.<sup>35</sup>



## Gaming as a Serious and Playful Subject

*Playing Place* takes games seriously as primary sources that suggest how cultures and communities see the world around them. At the same time, our contributors take the lessons of games to heart by embracing playful scholarship. Their essays draw from numerous academic disciplines—history, architectural history, material culture, popular culture, heritage studies, media studies, game studies, and cultural memory studies—yet are united by a belief that games matter and are worth examining.<sup>36</sup> To some scholars, especially those in game studies, such assertions are self-evident. The book started as an architectural history project, intending to continue work expanding the field to include popular-cultural subjects and analysis. It seeks to extend investigations of how different communities of non-professionals and nonacademics understand the built environment and engage with representations of it. It also seeks to develop interpretations of how tabletop games, in all their rich variety, contribute to contemporary knowledge formation about places in the real world and about processes of designing and building (structures, cities, careers in designing and building).

Artifacts signify the attitudes, biases, priorities, anxieties, and prejudices of their creators and users. *Playing Place* takes games, their boards, playing pieces, tokens, and cards as texts, open to interpretation and conveying meanings that can be discerned and interpreted like any other primary source.<sup>37</sup> Listening to objects, we access stories and viewpoints that might otherwise escape historical understandings (which privilege documentary sources and all their assumptions and limitations regarding access, privilege, and power). As Jeremy Antley has observed, “The historical preference for textual modes of knowledge creation and consumption [does] not adequately address the realities or epistemologies of gamic spaces.”<sup>38</sup>

Essays in this collection are less concerned with whether games accurately or precisely represent historical facts, events, and conditions (games generally don’t). Rather, contributors explore how games as media articulate rhetorical perspectives and historical mythologies. As physical products intended to be purchased and used, commercial board games reify ideas thought by their designers and publishers to have cultural currency, to reflect or engage popular subject matter in popular ways, and thus to be marketable. As a result, games serve as compelling sources for understanding assumptions about and interpretations of how the world works (or worked at a particular time). Games are especially useful as historical source material for a couple of other reasons. First, in their limitations (of the patience and interests of their presumed players, their costs, their materials, and their own traditions), games boil down depictions of the past or present to a legible assembly of rules, pieces, and game boards. As the editors of a recent book on wargames note, game design

encodes assumptions about historical events (or contemporary real-world situations) into the mechanics of the game itself. In this they are no different from any other system of representation, since it is in the nature of a model to simplify the complexity of the world . . . [and] tabletop games offer one of the most transparent demonstrations of this process. Their rules and procedures are available for all to see.<sup>39</sup>

Second, because board gaming is considered a hobby and its physical components are seen as ephemera, they are often dismissed as insignificant. Gaming is a pastime, a way to while away the hours until more substantive activities and undertakings call us back to the “real world.” As a result, we often overlook any larger cultural insights or emancipatory potential that might attach to playing games but are concealed in their supposed inconsequentiality.

Essays including those by Holly Nielsen, Ruth W. Lo, and Diana Garvin explore how dominant place-based colonial norms are recapitulated in board games. Amy Ogata, Jeremy Braddock, and others examine similar processes relating to consumption and capitalism. These essays, along with those by Richard Ruth and Jonathan Bullinger and Aaron Trammell, focus as well on how board games transmit and reflect nationalist rhetoric. That historical games perpetuated attitudes held by dominant cultures, and that many contemporary games continue to do so, is clear. Most game are mass-market products that their makers hoped would find buyers. Calling attention to the presentation of these ideas in an alternative media format, however, especially one assumed to be unimportant, extends our awareness of where and how such rhetorical power is deployed.

*Playing Place* was made possible by the attention that archives, special collections, and museums have directed toward games and play. The book’s essays draw from games and materials held by the Newbury Library, the Library of Congress, the Harry Ransom Center, the University of Oxford and others. The largest and most significant collection by far is at the Strong National Museum of Play. By acquiring games and related archival papers and records, its staff make possible studies of games otherwise lost or concealed in corporate archives that offer little or no public access. As historians continue to recognize games for the insights that they provide about popular culture and place, these collections will only grow more important.

## Games for Learning and Teaching

Because they are considered contingent and “low stakes,” games offer settings where players can let down their guard and take risks they might otherwise avoid. The varied pathways that unfold in gaming sessions and their unforeseen and multivalent outcomes open opportunities for new insights and potentialities. Studies on the pedagogical potential of play continue to grow in number, including those in design, planning, and heritage education.<sup>40</sup> Essays by Quilian Riano and Erik Champion and Juan Hiriart illustrate how board game models



can structure participatory design and heritage conservation learning experiences for students and community members.

Our contributor Maurice Suckling claims elsewhere that the value of historically themed board games is derived in part from their engaging nature and how they embody what he calls "the elixir of experiential meaning."<sup>41</sup> He states that "games are machines for making us feel. So lessons learnt by way of feeling them, through having done them, sounds not so much like a theoretically viable alternative means of learning, as a theoretically evidently superior (and tangibly testable) means of learning."<sup>42</sup> Suckling argues for the pedagogical value of historically themed games because they teach through experience, when players act in models representing (even abstractly) real-world conditions. "By doing, players are feeling, and so therefore most memorably learning."<sup>43</sup>

Games can challenge the deterministic tendencies of historical inquiry, the inclination to see what happened in the past as the only possible outcome or logical sequence of events. They can introduce ahistorical anachronisms or juxtapositions that prompt reconsiderations of established historical interpretations and relationships. They offer space to challenge the usual, the certain, and the assumed. By reopening and turning over historical decisions to players within a framework of limitations, new alternative scenarios can result that then illuminate why something happened the way it did or how it might have turned out differently. Of course, those frameworks and limitations are determined by the game design and have embedded within them the perspectives and biases of their designers.<sup>44</sup>

Joshua Daniel-Wariya has explored how Johan Huizinga's foundational work *Homo Ludens* should be read with an understanding of how the author saw history not as a static realm of fixed interpretation but as creative space of wordplay and experimentation. According to Daniel-Wariya, "The playful and poetic moves Huizinga makes in his writing are, in fact, rhetorical strategies used to make knowledge about play."<sup>45</sup> *Playing Place* contributors embrace this approach, offering speculative and playful explication that burrow in between disciplines, carve space for the anecdotal, and bounce beyond academic grooves.

Board gamers are intellectually curious and reflective about their hobby. The opportunity to immerse in an environment to which one is unaccustomed (a different place, time, role), to ponder alternative historical scenarios, and to use games as springboards to develop a knowledge of historical events and contexts are common topics of discussion in blogs, posts on BoardGameGeek, forums on Consimworld, and YouTube videos. This is especially true of conflict simulation game players who often undertake deep readings of historical accounts and exchange reading lists related to the battles and wars that transpire on their tabletops.<sup>46</sup> Shared player perspectives, images, and arguments enrich discussions of gaming culture and help scholars understand how games have been received, interpreted, and often modified by consumers.



As the essays here suggest, board games often convey moralistic expectations—about what one should desire (a new home, fame, money, success, national prestige, the power to enact an envisioned design), what change one should accept about the world around us, how one should behave.<sup>47</sup> Games can be explicitly didactic, teaching, for example, the rules of the road. Pontiac's promotional *Safety Drive Game* was distributed at car dealerships in the late 1930s. The 1973 game *Driver Ed* helped drivers in training recognize common road hazards. Forty years later, the Sierra Leone Road Transport Authority made playing their road safety game *The Driver's Way* a required step in obtaining a driver's license.<sup>48</sup> A US Department of Housing and Urban Development employee developed a board game in 1970 to help teach other HUD administrators about the process of urban renewal. Each player took on the role of a director of a local urban renewal agency charged with carrying out a multiyear "Neighborhood Development Program within a limited budget."<sup>49</sup>

Didactic games present information, opinions, or ideologies as entertainment, they make complex ideas more easily digestible, or stealthily indoctrinate under the guise of harmless fun. Milton Bradley, writing specifically to guide parents in the selection of games, stated:

Because of the attraction for games that exists in the mind of every young child, the playing of games under proper influences and right management can be made decidedly helpful in the direction of those studies which the child regards as less attractive. For this purpose let the game be selected that will treat mildly of the subject, but still with enough interest in the method to sugar coat the instruction imparted, until after a little while the dislike or indifference of the child to that line of investigation may be overcome or modified. This whole matter seems to be merely a question of making the knowledge of words and things interesting rather than a task, and applies as well to adults as infants, and to the home as to the kindergarten.<sup>50</sup>

The lessons some games teach are laudable, others are not. Like many games, the player with the most money at the end of the 1980 game *Public Assistance* (with its tag line, "Why Bother Working for a Living?") was victorious. Unlike other games, players struck it rich not through savvy real estate deals or bold risk-taking but by swindling the US government's social safety net. *Public Assistance* left no doubt about the designer's prejudiced views of those who received welfare while (according to the designer) engaging in gambling, prostitution, drugs, and armed robbery, and who got ahead in the game by landing on spaces labeled "have illegitimate child" or "sleep all day." The rule book stated that for greater realism, "two players may decide to take this great game to the waiting room of their local welfare office and invite two real life able-bodied welfare recipients to join them in the game while they are waiting for their food stamps and welfare checks."<sup>51</sup>

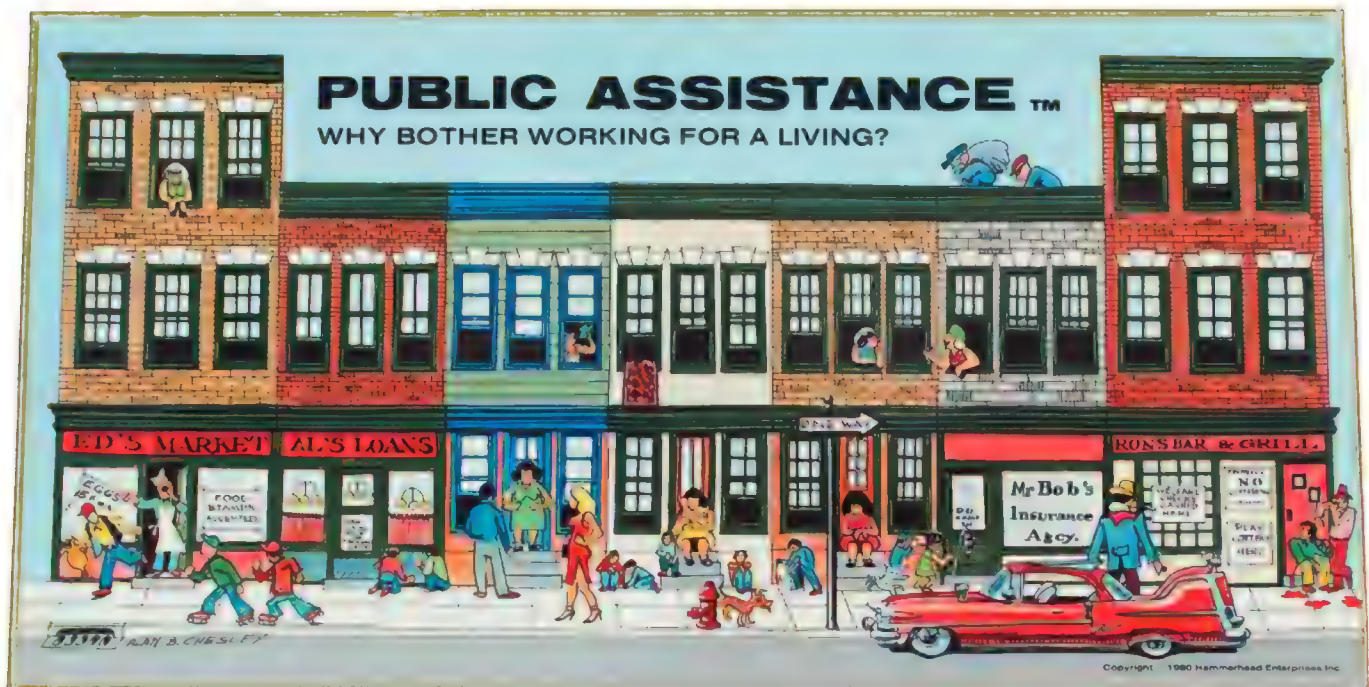


Figure 0.14: Game box  
for the 1980 game *Public  
Assistance*.

Game boxes, advertisements, and store displays, as well as games themselves reinforced gendered and heterosexual norms. Trade magazines suggested that care was needed to make men comfortable in toy departments, but if handed correctly (by increasing the presence of mechanically themed toys and games), men could be reliable consumers. The infantilization of the adult male consumer as a boy in men's clothing, easily persuaded by shiny toys and games that played to their masculinity, was a common refrain in such publications.<sup>52</sup> Manufacturers and retailers drew upon cultural assumptions and gendered stereotypes to target different market segments: males like games about war, conquest, and technology; females prefer nurturing, shopping, and romance.<sup>53</sup> Milton Bradley's 1964 catalog included two new games with the same mechanic that had players knock over tokens with marbles. One, *POW! The Cannon Game for Boys*, had marbles acting as cannonballs launched to hit and knock over cardboard soldiers. The other, *WOW! The Pillow Fight Game for Girls*, replaced the cannons with beds that shot marbles at cardboard girlfriends to mimic a slumber party pillow fight. The 1967 box for Milton Bradley's classic *Battleship* shows father and son caught up in a game while mother and daughter do the dishes in the background; the women vicariously enjoy the male play as they work cleaning up a meal that they also undoubtedly prepared.



## Conclusion

*Playing Place* came together at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic. With new rounds of variants and restrictions, the pandemic continued to draw more people into board gaming and spur new games that address current events through a spatial lens. At the time of writing, BoardGameGeek lists twelve games featuring a COVID-19 theme. In 2020, Alan R. Moon, designer of the popular *Ticket to Ride* train game series, released a free “print-and-play” expansion titled *Ticket to Ride: Stay at Home* that had quarantined players assembling routes between the various rooms of a house.<sup>54</sup> The game reduces the expansiveness of most games in the series (which typically cover continents and countries) to the domestic scale. Drawing on the same heteronormative family structures and idealized dwelling forms (with three bathrooms, a master closet, and Dad’s chair) common throughout gaming history, the game re-envisioned the COVID-era home not as a place of confinement and isolation but as one of travel and adventure.

Games seemingly have the power to reconfigure perceptions of space, to deploy (and sometimes recalibrate) existing understandings of place, even if only for the duration of a play session. When we look at contemporary games, and when we look back at earlier games developed twenty, fifty, or a hundred years ago, they offer views of how cultures make use of the surrounding world. Ostensibly these efforts were intended to sell games by latching on to current trends and ideas in circulation at the time. But a closer look at games as objects of material culture, as physical manifestations of collective memory, helps open new readings of the process of design and city shaping, of experiencing and using cultural landscapes. The essays that follow demonstrate how the seemingly simple act of play and the development of games for the seemingly innocuous passing of time offer access to important understandings about place.



Figure 0.15: Cartoon from the July 1950 issue of the trade magazine *Playthings*.



Figure 0.16: The game box for *Battleship* illustrates assumed users and observers.



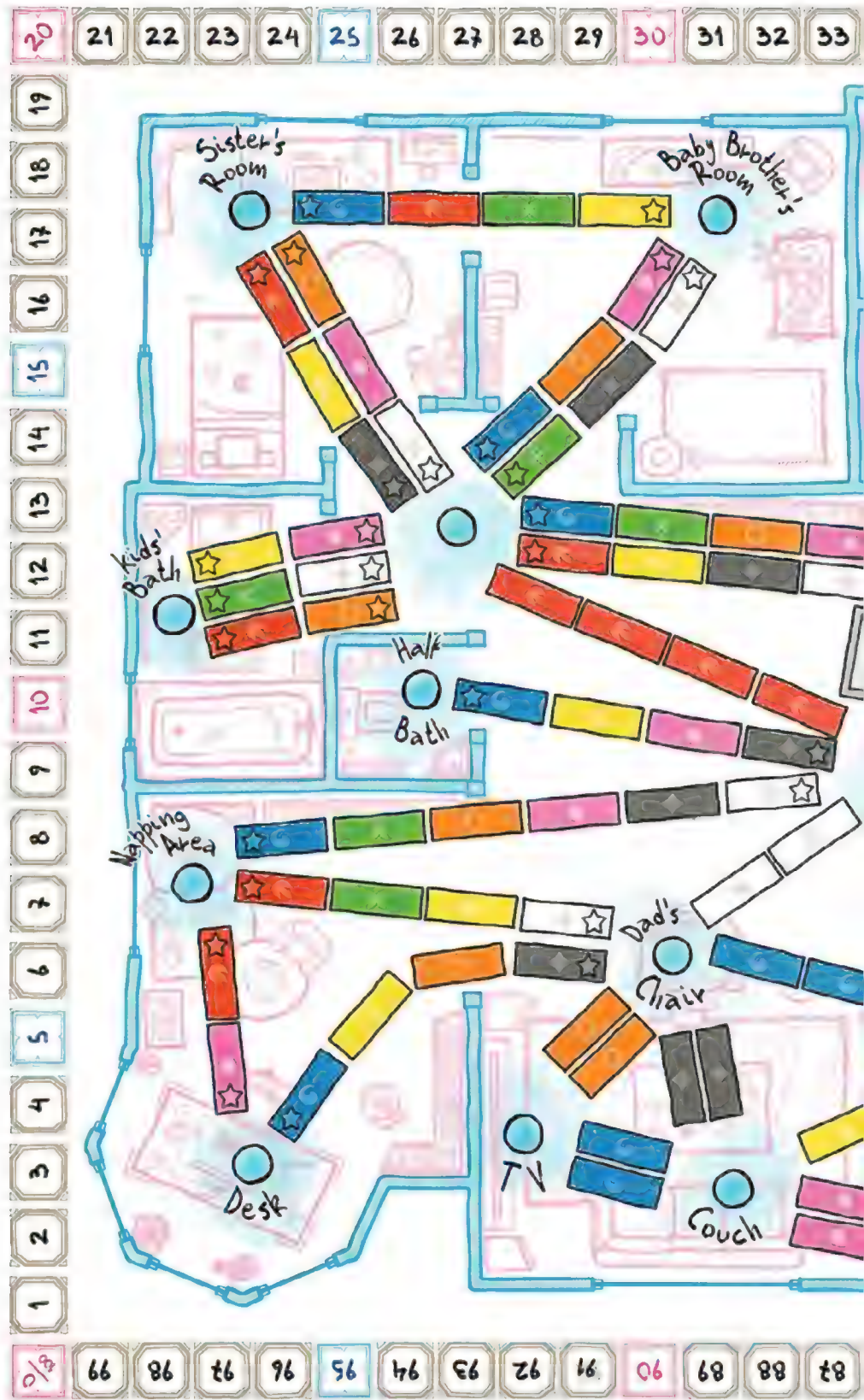
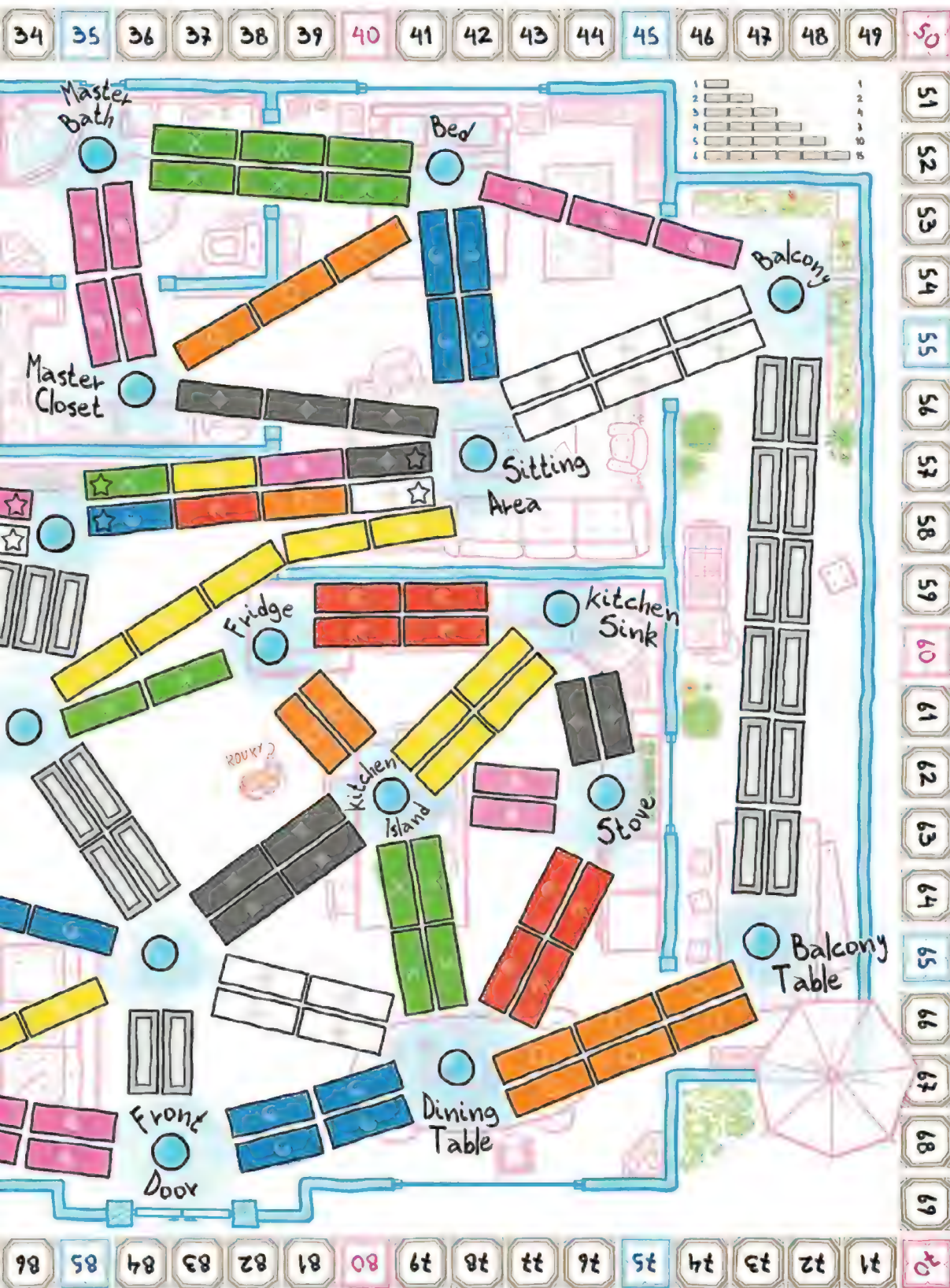


Figure 0.17: 2020 *Ticket to Ride: Stay at Home* "print-and-play" expansion.









# **Aspirational Ideals**



# Player TV

## Board Games in TV Land

Lynn Spigel



Figure 1.1: Still frame from Video Village Junior, a CBS Saturday morning TV version of Video Village.



In 1960, Milton Bradley released *Video Village*, a board game fashioned on the TV game show of the same title. Both versions were designed around city sidewalks on which players (or their pawns) moved through a series of lucky and unlucky encounters. After rolling the dice, the player advances the indicated number of steps on the pavement, each sidewalk slab graphically depicting places, instructions, punishments, or prizes: "U-turn," "safety zone," "bank," "jewelry store," "jail," and so on. The TV contestants were always a heterosexual duo, and the plastic game pawns were molded accordingly in male and female bodily forms. As they advance to the finish line, the duo stroll past shops (rendered whimsically on scenery flats that flank the stage), an image made even more thrilling on the game box, which transformed TV's black-and-white town into a living-color shopper's paradise. Part lesson in civic obedience, part road trip to success, *Video Village* epitomized the governmental, commercial, and gender ideals of postwar America. But, at a more abstract level, the game also speaks to the conflation between mediated and material space that constituted the TV board game in its midcentury heyday.

TV board games proliferated in the 1950s and '60s, contemporaneous with the rise of the three-network system, and they have endured (in changed forms) even into the present. Board games served as commercial tie-ins for television, indicating the already transmedial nature of TV before the rise of digital convergence, where every media text anticipates yet another iteration of a franchise. TV board games were a mode of transmedia "world-building" that allowed players to participate in, and even rebuild, the imaginary TV worlds on which they were based. The TV board game did this largely through the manipulation of scale.

TV game shows are defined by (and often named after) their gigantic standing sets: wheels of fortune, 10,000 dollar pyramids, or the three-story tic-tac-toe board on *Hollywood Squares*. Television's *Video Village* was itself a scaled-up model of a board game. Its sidewalk set design resembles *Monopoly*, complete with a life-size jail. Colossal dice (rendered in extreme close-up) roll inside an hourglass-shaped cage, turning an ordinary game of chance into a TV spectacle. Conversely, the board game is all about miniaturization. The hourglass and dice shrink to bite-size game pieces; the jail has the dimensions of a dollhouse.

The miniature "presents a manipulatable . . . version of experience, a version which is domesticated."<sup>1</sup> TV board games allowed players to touch TV, to turn the ethereal, uncanny spaces of TV Land into a plaything that can literally be toyed with in the physical space of the home. Put another way, TV board games are what Michel de Certeau calls "spatial stories," "metaphorai" that figuratively move people (as players or pawns) between imaginary TV worlds and lived environments.<sup>2</sup> Although board games came with detailed instructions, as spatial stories, they also allowed players to navigate their path through TV land, to take their own walk through a video village.



Figure 1.2: Video Village board game box from 1960.



Figure 1.3: The Beverly Hillbillies 1963 game board.



TV board games are often gamifications of sitcoms and dramas. In these examples, scale is as much about narrative time as it is about space. These games pare down a TV series' story arc to a few memorable plots or character relations. They often take the form of trivia games that challenge players to recall tiny bits of narrative information, parts for wholes. The game boards frequently give players a master view of the series by providing a schematic map that scales down the program's narrative spaces to its most iconic sets. *The Beverly Hillbillies* game board (1963) features a cartoonish architectural sketch of the mansion's central floor plan. Similarly, the *Columbo* game board (1973) depicts rooms in a house the detective investigates. The board for the *Love Boat World Cruise Game* (1980) is a map of the world.

In her essay on television's spatial ontologies, Margaret Morse calls TV the "quintessential miniature," which, like a mall, de-realizes physical place by turning it into a model of lived environments.<sup>3</sup> In distinction, the network-era TV board games "re-realize" TV's de-realized spaces by offering their own world in miniature. Today, these miniature worlds have become memory spaces, a thriving part of board game retro-culture that includes not only the original games but also newer mash-ups like *Friends-opoly*. In the context of our digital media ecosphere, the vintage games, with their tattered boxes and moldy smells, are material reminders of the scales of time.

For the boomers and Xers who played them, TV board games ultimately recall the miniature play worlds of childhood. Miniatures have the paradoxical ability to magnify meaning and sentiment, to make childhood memories larger-than-life.<sup>4</sup> For me, *Video Village* offers a perfect example. I remember myself as a child enthralled by the toy town on my TV screen. I wanted to live in a video village. And while I never owned the game, I'm sure this is why I bought it at a thrift store some ten years ago. As a material thing, the secondhand game restores a childhood wish. But in the end, the game is (literally!) a screen memory, a filter that screens out something much larger (or repressed) that I can't quite touch or hold. In this sense, it seems appropriate that my thrift store game is missing dice and has just one pawn. Like the elusive spaces of childhood memory, *Video Village* is a place I want to revisit but can't ever really replay.



# ***Scrabble* and the Image of the (Out-of-Work) Architect**

Athanasiou Geolas



Figure 1.4: Alfred Moshier Butts in 1981 presenting his 1930s game *Criss-Cross Words* (later renamed *Scrabble*) with hand-inked plywood pieces and letter racks made of repurposed architectural molding.

Alfred Mosher Butts had been working in a New York City architecture firm when, like so many others, he lost his job to the Great Depression. Looking for ways to pay his bills, he turned to illustrating city scenes and even compiling statistics. It was during this hiatus, sometime around 1934, that Butts developed the board game known today as *Scrabble*.<sup>1</sup>

In his book *The Image of the Architect*, Andrew Saint provided a social and cultural context for an architectural profession that derived meaning from a number of hyphenated roles. His discussion of the 1920s and '30s United States presents two figures: the architect-businessman and the architect-genius.<sup>2</sup> So what are we to make of Alfred Butts, the out-of-work architect? The man who worked many different jobs, is remembered as an architect, yet is most famous for inventing a board game. It is strange to think that a job described as a discipline, vocation, and profession doesn't in fact require you to have a job at all. However ironic, the cultural history of the image of the architect seems incomplete without *Scrabble*.

After inventing early versions of *Scrabble*, but before he began manufacturing and distributing the game, Butts returned to work at an architecture firm. Early game boards reveal that Butts developed *Scrabble*'s distinctive grid on a drafting table, which he then reproduced as a cyanotype, or blueprint. In white lettering surrounded by a chalky Prussian blue, the bottom-left corner of these early boards notes Butts's work address in the "Architects Building" a purpose-built Manhattan high-rise developed by and for building-industry professionals. It was common for architecture firms to encourage their draftsmen to pursue opportunities on the side so long as they kept up on the firm's current projects.<sup>3</sup> Moonlighting encouraged draftsmen to develop their skills and kept them occupied when work was slow; it is likely that Butts had access to the materials for making these early board game blueprints owing to a similar policy. Early boards also suggest that Butts sought out a patent for his invention, receiving a patent for *Criss-Cross Words* (the game's original title) in 1938. While profit was a controversial motivation among professional architects before 1929, the lean years that followed wiped away much of this ambivalence.<sup>4</sup>

*Scrabble*'s success was a long time coming, due in no small part to the difficulties of constructing the game without a dedicated factory. According to one account, Butts singlehandedly "glued the printed letter sheets onto thin plywood, cutting them out with a fine jigsaw."<sup>5</sup> He then "glued the grids to old checkerboards, and cut the racks from architectural molding he found in a lumberyard." With extensive help from friends and family, Butts had built eighty-four game sets by 1934 inside his Queens apartment. Later, by 1949, game production had increased to 12 games per hour, or about 2,400 sets a year.<sup>6</sup> Typically, histories of postwar US architecture turn quickly to the impacts of mass production, mass culture, and the many forms of infrastructure they demand. Butts's game could not have become so successful without these underlying infrastructures,

including sprawling suburbs, the explosion of single-family households in need of new board games, and the industrial expertise for efficient game manufacture and distribution. After Butts sold the rights for *Criss-Cross Words* to James and Helen Brunot, who made a new patent submission under the name *Scrabble* in 1956, production shot up to over 3.8 million annually. Selchow & Richter later purchased the game, and by the 1980s, was producing *Scrabble* components in multiple factory locations across the United States and internationally in more than thirty different languages.

*Scrabble's* novelty, and indeed its success, lies in its combination of multiple game types. In his effort to invent something new that would find its way into every US home, Butts categorized existing games into three categories—or so the story goes. Indeed, it appears that Butts left a detailed description of the process he went through in designing the game in his personal papers. Without this archive, now held by Butts's great-nephew, the game's full history—Butts's design process, the attribution of a point value to each letter, the difficulties of game production before it was taken up by a major toy company—would have been lost.<sup>7</sup> But we do know all of this, and as Beatriz Colomina has underlined, media savvy and a carefully archived legacy may well be at the core of architects' professional mythologies.<sup>8</sup>

As part of a promotional tour in 1985, Butts visited one *Scrabble* factory in Vermont that produced oversize pieces for a version of the game designed for young children. A photo that ran alongside newspaper coverage of the trip depicted the (then retired) architect standing behind Lisa Kuhns at her station in the factory. The image suggests the continuing tension in architecture's history between glorified designers and unacknowledged laborers. Perhaps more importantly, it also shows the hierarchies



Figure 1.5: Butts stands behind Lisa Kuhns at her station in the Fairfax factory.



Figure 1.6: Butts, photographed in the Fairfax factory sitting on a mound of Scrabble tiles.



this tension normalizes. Board games, like most consumer products, continue to be assembled by hand in factories, and such labors have complex impacts on the world beyond the factory floor, from steady employment and health hazards to architectural metanarratives and the extraction of cultural capital.<sup>9</sup>

In many ways, Butts's story is not uncommon. It echoes the self-made inventor narratives of American entrepreneurial mythology, except that, as Butts's profilers almost always mentioned, *Scrabble* did not make its designer wealthy. They quickly counter with the flip side of the inventor myth, though, describing the out-of-work architect's board game as a labor of love.

# The Domestic Bliss of Life

D. Medina Lasansky



Figure 1.7: The "Poor Farm" depicted on *The Game of Life's* game board.

[illegible]



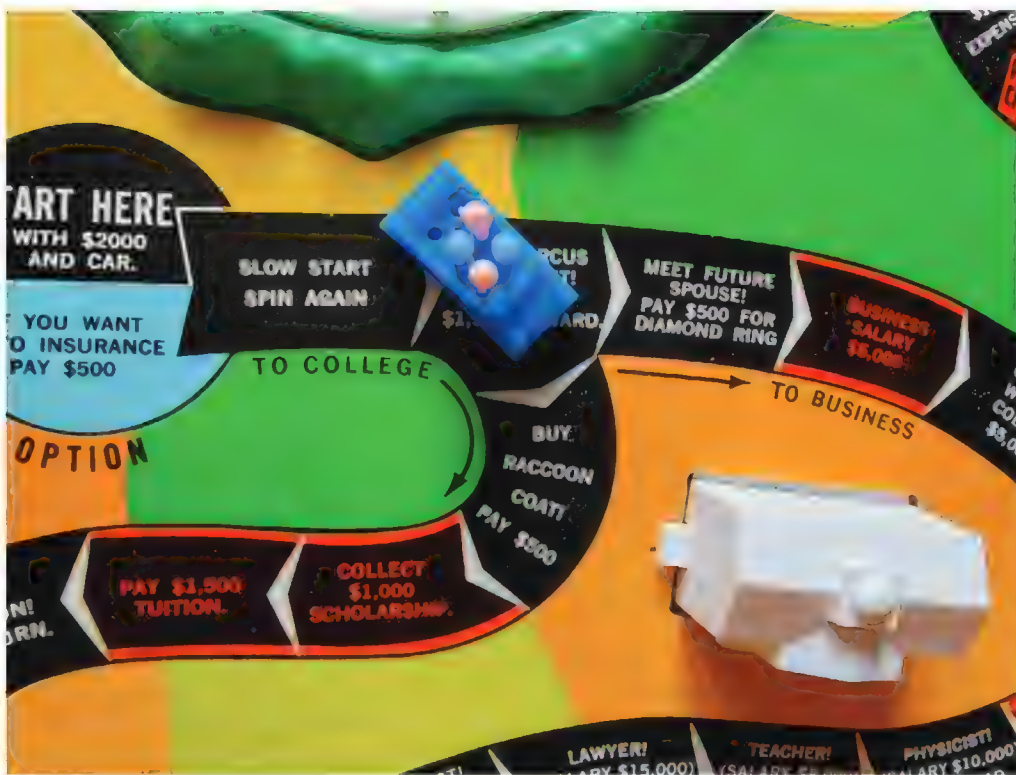


Figure 1.9: Detail of *The Game of Life*'s plastic car and pegs.

a doctor pays the most—two times that of a teacher. And like *Monopoly*, *Trump*, *Acquire*, and other popular games, financial success determines the winner. In *Life*, those with money can retire to Millionaire Acres. Those in debt end up at the Poor Farm. Along the way, players spin a miniature wheel of fortune, built into the game board, and land on spaces that determine if they get married, have kids, lose or win at the slots, crash their car, have a chance to buy a house, a fur coat, insurance, or stock in a uranium mine. The game is supposed to mimic the pitfalls of real life. In the process, it conditions an understanding of domestic bliss.

Milton Bradley introduced the game, designed anew by Reuben Klammer, at the annual toy fair on the company's one hundredth anniversary. The popular radio and television personality Art Linkletter "heartily" endorsed the game, and his likeness appeared on the game box as well as the game's money. A personal friend of Walt Disney and Ronald Reagan and a lifelong Republican, Linkletter's seal of approval provided the ultimate face to family values. In fact, the game box noted that the game was a "family game" for anyone over the age of ten. Most importantly, Linkletter's image would have been familiar as the host of the TV programs *House Party* and *People Are Funny*. He was also a primary promoter of the plastic Hula-Hoop craze in the United States beginning in 1958.

*The Game of Life* has been continually in print and regularly revised since its first iteration in 1860. Milton Bradley's periodic updates reflect contemporary practices and cultural anxieties. Much of this has been chronicled by Jill Lepore

as well as by Tristan Donovan. The Poor Farm was eliminated from the game in the late 1970s (decades after social security had done the same). The fur coat was replaced by a coat without fur in later editions. The uranium mine stock was eliminated at the same time. Minivans (in reality, introduced by Chrysler with the Dodge Caravan in 1983) replaced the convertible, so that couples could now have more kids and cart more stuff.<sup>1</sup> By 1991 players got credit for recycling and helping the homeless. And in 2018 there were additional pegs for pets.

*Life* is one of the best-selling board games of all time—translated into more than twenty languages and featured in movies such as the 2018 film *Game Night*. That same year, the game was inducted into the National Toy Hall of Fame along with *Clue*, *Scrabble*, *Monopoly*, and *Candyland*.

So why has the game remained so popular?

It is a suburban game espousing suburban values. Players aspire to owning a single-family well-insured home—the trappings of postwar suburban bliss. Injection-molded plastic houses (the three-dimensional game was the first of its kind) and institutional buildings dispersed around the playing board signal prosperity. Colored patches of space separating buildings and roads in the 1960 edition are filled in with depictions of backyards and greenery in editions released in subsequent decades. The collection of three modernist high-rises resemble a prosperous corporate office complex rather than a housing project.

Like other postwar board games such as *Careers*, *Mystery Date*, and *General Hospital*, *The Game of Life* reinforces heteronormative middle-class values—acquiring a good job and partner of the opposite sex. Though there are random chances for “lucky days,” the narrative is largely prescribed from youth to old age: a pathway of matrimony, childbearing, career, paydays, and interest payments. In *Life* it is impossible to remain unwed or jobless and difficult to not have children and still win. (Each child conveys a reward at the end of the game, a sort of earned income credit.) Players can only get married once and can only have one job. As the rules say, “There’s a law against bigamy” and “Once a doctor, always a doctor.”

Other postwar assumptions prevail in the 1960s edition. Players benefit from intergenerational wealth, as each begins with \$2,000 cash. With nonwhite or ethnic cultures or lifeways absent, the game is implicitly white. As we know, there are very few board game designers of color. This seems to carry over to the design of the games themselves and *Life* is no exception. Among the most distinctive game pieces in board game history, the plastic cars and pegs introduced in the 1960 edition reinforce postwar heteronormative gender expectations. Players are provided a binary choice of pink or blue colored pegs to represent themselves in the game, pink for females and blue for males. While later editions increased the variety of vehicles and landscapes, and increased the range of choices for players (from careers to pet ownership), the pink and blue colored pegs have endured.

# Barbie Queen of the Prom

Alice T. Friedman



Figure 1.10: Game box for *The Barbie Game*.



When I was eleven, I spent Saturday afternoons playing *Barbie Queen of the Prom* with a kid who lived down the street. It was only for a few months, and I don't remember what happened after that. I'm pretty sure we drifted apart, the way kids do when they get more involved with school, sports, ballet lessons, or other sorts of suburban teenage kid activities. My friend—I'm pretty sure her name really was Barbie—had just received the game, and her mom really wanted me and some other neighborhood girls to come over and play as often as we could. Barbie didn't go to our school, and I don't think she had many friends.



Figure 1.11: Prom dress cards for *The Barbie Game*.

On those Saturdays at Barbie's, we sat around the dining room table, playing the game for hours at a time. Four players, plus Barbie's mom. Barbie in her wheelchair and the rest of us in straight-backed chairs pulled right up to the big wooden table, which I remember as Danish modern, a light-brown surface floating in the airy, double-height room. There were tons of windows, right up to the ceiling, and a fireplace made of big stones. Barbie's mom moved the game piece around the board for her daughter because her arms and hands didn't move the way she wanted them to, but Barbie hung in there with the rest of us, cracking up as she picked boyfriends and prom dresses and earned money babysitting.

Barbie could only talk a little bit—really more sounds than words—and it was hard to understand her until you got used to it, but just like the rest of us, she liked a good laugh and cracked up when the game got really weird. It was 1961, and the game had just come out, but even then, all of us recognized how dumb it was to play a game in which the goal was landing a steady boyfriend, buying

a prom dress, and becoming president of a high school club. We already knew the codes of design, clothing, and behavior that separated people into categories: ranch house versus modern house; up-to-date fashions versus preppy “good taste”; Pontiacs and Chevys versus Oldsmobiles and Cadillacs.

Saturday afternoons in the suburbs were pretty quiet, dispersed and dreamy, with all those closed-off houses and landscaped lawns lined up on quarter-acre lots. Still, the game board did a good job creating an imaginary town that we moved through in teenage fits and starts via our game pieces. It didn’t feel much like the place where we actually lived, more like a movie set where kids went on dates at the Main Street soda shop, and the high school was full of glamorous people living fantasy lives. Of course, we understood that the worlds of Barbie, the board game character, and Barbie, the kid we played with, were different.

What I remember best, some fifty (plus) years after my last *Barbie Queen of the Prom* session, was how intimately all of us tween girls knew those boys on the “boyfriend cards” and the types they represented. Four boys, one for each girl, and each guy was shown in a color drawing of his head and shoulders, all different . . . except all were white.

That Ken was the best boyfriend went without saying, because we all played with Barbie and Ken dolls. In the game, Ken wore a sports jacket and a bow tie. Then there was Tom, who wore glasses and a V-neck sweater—clearly the intellectual. I was drawn to blond Bob because I coveted his red-and-white-striped sweater. He looked very artsy and cool, but my secret crush was on Poindexter, a redheaded nerd with a yellow sweater and a quizzical expression. Everyone tried to avoid getting Poindexter, and we howled with laughter at the girl who had the bad luck to pick that card, but deep down I didn’t really mind. Even then, I had a feeling that the least popular and weirdest-looking kid might actually be the most fun and the smartest—I hoped so, anyway, since I was kind of on the outer fringes of the cool circle myself.



Figure 1.12: Boyfriend cards for *The Barbie Game*.

It is no-brainer of feminist criticism that games like *Barbie Queen of the Prom* don't teach girls to be the smart, empowered women that we hope they will become. We all know that Barbie is a poor role model, from body image to emotional and sexual object choices. That the game was deeply heterosexist, rigidly binary, and materialistic is barely worth mentioning. I know now that Barbie eventually overcame the straitened world of the game board she grew up on, and she became a successful career woman, complete with the best outfits, each perfectly suited to her career option. She had choices that at the time neither we nor the people who created her even imagined, and she went from rooming in a cut-out paper apartment with a bunch of other flight attendants to owning a big, pink plastic mansion of her own.

I can tell you from personal experience that the whole heterosexist hegemony thing didn't faze me one bit: I saw it everywhere around me anyway, and even then, I had an inkling that it wasn't for me. The game's fantasy world was fun for a bunch of girls in 1961. We loved the clothes, the cards, and the little metal charms that represented the school clubs (drama, art, etc.) that you could join. It was all pretty harmless. The game unfolded a pretty good story as we moved the little charms around the board, and we laughed a lot, and we tolerated Barbie's mom, because she was part of the deal. A bunch of tweens hanging out, and geeking out, on Saturday afternoons over a game that we knew wasn't real life—what could be better?





Figure 1.13: Game board for The Barbie Game.





## **Contesting Designed and Planned Space**





# ***Skyscraper***

## **Replaying Epic Battles in City Planning**

Jennifer Minner



Figure 2.1: Skyscraper game box.

In the 1937 game *Skyscraper*, the essential building blocks of the modern city fit in one's hand. There are two paths to winning. One is to build a skyscraper on a designated spot. The other is to develop a complete garden community. These two competing images of urban futures—reinforcing a dense urban core versus garden cities—drive at the heart of city-planning debates of the 1920s and 1930s. The first path (depicted on the box in a style reminiscent of the architect and illustrator Hugh Ferriss) is “metropolitanism,” and the second (involving building a complete low-density city) is “regionalism.”<sup>1</sup> These competing paradigms persist in debates about the future of urban life post-COVID-19.

In the game board and its tiny pieces, *Skyscraper* clearly idealizes the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) New England town. Every street has ample greenery, and all religious buildings must have a steeple on top. This set is strongly reminiscent of a regionalist formula of city building inspired by Ebenezer Howard and Patrick Geddes.<sup>2</sup> Howard set out to build alternatives to nineteenth-century London as a series of garden communities featuring the best characteristics of both town and country. Howard's writings in *Garden Cities of To-morrow* fueled the efforts of a radical group of architects and planners across the Atlantic, including Clarence Stein and Lewis Mumford, who were among the founders of the Regional Planning Association of America (RPAA).<sup>3</sup> Patrick Geddes's writings on the survey of regional environs and the evolution of cities were also deeply influential in regionalist thinking. In the RPAA's publication *The Survey* and in promotional materials such as the film *The City* (1939), regionalists advocated for the development of a “web of satellite cities,” built at low densities and perfectly balancing nature and culture.<sup>4</sup> Planned communities were to provide escape from the overcrowding, congestion, and chaos of the built-up central city, which was labeled the “dinosaur city” or “city of the dead.”<sup>5</sup> The RPAA was quite radical in envisioning cooperative ownership of land, and some of the association's dreams were partially realized during the 1930s. The federal government planned to construct thousands of new greenbelt towns based on regionalist models in an effort to recover from the Great Depression. *Skyscraper* appeared in the same year that Greenbelt, Maryland, the first of three federal New Deal greenbelt towns, was constructed.

While the game has some visual similarities to regionalist plans of the 1920s and 1930s, it is very much rooted in private property and capitalist notions of city building. District cards are distributed to all players, dictating a particular spatial organization of commercial, residential, municipal, and religious land uses. This is the language and logic of early zoning, which was first adopted in New York City in 1916. Zoning underlines the central role of private property and the public sector's role in guiding orderly development. At the time *Skyscraper* appeared, the planned separation of land uses, guided by zoning, was known but still a fairly recent innovation in many communities.



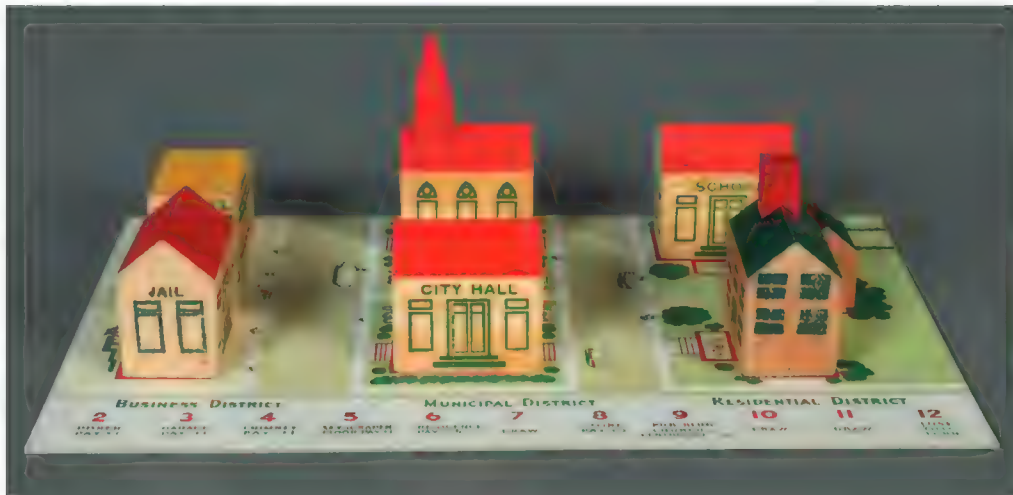


Figure 2.2: One of four district cards included in Skyscraper.



Figure 2.3: Skyscraper's Players, Insurance Policies, and Luck cards.

A leitmotif of risk and profit runs throughout the game. One is compelled to draw from the Luck cards from time to time. A disaster card wipes out development through fire, cyclones, flooding, or high wind. One may mitigate risk through the purchase of various tiered insurance policies. Players beware: not all policies insure against all risks. Players who have more money to begin with are more likely to be able to afford an All Risk insurance policy. Here are the embedded lessons of property development in a capitalist system.

*Skyscraper* has some resemblance to *Monopoly*, the game originally created by Elizabeth Magie Phillips, who sought to promote the trust-busting visions of the politician and economist Henry George. George argued for collective ownership of "everything found in nature, particularly land," and where that was not possible, a "land value tax" on those who owned land.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps *Skyscraper* also has hidden origins in more radical notions of cooperative land ownership that morphed in meaning as *Monopoly* did. More likely, *Skyscraper* may simply be an accurate portrayal of the limited imagination of city builders at that time, who pursued images of the "modern," exclusive, all-WASP town.

*Skyscraper* seems a timeless touchstone to reflect on how far urban planning and city politics have come. More than eighty years later, playing this game can inspire contemporary questions: To what extent has city planning redressed the incompleteness and harm represented in dangerously simplistic imaginaries of city futures? Has city building truly rejected the blueprint of WASPness? Do communities rely inappropriately on insurance as a panacea for addressing environmental risks in an era of climate change? Does city planning endlessly vacillate between mirages that are cover for the same game of quick construction and profit?

# From Monopoly to Taudis-Poly

Samia Henni



Figure 2.4: *Taudis-Poly* game board, conceived by Fathi Bouaroua and realized together with Didac'Ressources.



In April 2019, Fathi Bouaroua, an activist in the southern French city of Marseille, together with the members of the association Didac'Ressources, created the board game *Taudis-Poly: Le logement est un droit. Le taudis est un crime* (*Taudis-Poly: Housing Is a Right. Hovel Is a Crime*). This *Monopoly* parody was conceived a few months after the collapse of two apartments buildings that caused the death of eight people in the Noailles neighborhood of Marseille the previous November. The *Taudis-Poly* press release stated that "this game is a scream. A scream of a woman holding the banner of the November 5 Collective in front of the town hall of Marseille on December 10, 2018. She was screaming her anger: 'They will have to stop playing *Monopoly* with our lives.'"<sup>1</sup> Caused by the lack, if not absence, of maintenance, the sudden collapse of these buildings was not the first of its kind in France's second-largest city. According to the French newspaper *Le Monde*, 13 percent of Marseille's housing stock was both substandard and at risk of collapse.<sup>2</sup>

Whereas the US antimonopolist game designer, writer, and feminist Lizzie Magie created *The Landlord's Game*—the precursor of *Monopoly*—in 1903 to illustrate the effects of private properties and land value taxes, *Taudis-Poly* was designed to expose Marseille's unfit housing conditions and to raise awareness of a corrupt housing system that offers tax breaks to owners who purchase properties but fail to maintain them. This board game and the collapse of the buildings were featured in the exhibition *Housing Pharmacology* at the Museum of the History of Marseille in 2020.<sup>3</sup> The show presented a series of conversations with Marseille inhabitants that explored competing visions and lived experiences through textual and audiovisual records. Among the exhibit's voices were *Taudis-Poly* cocreator Fathi Bouaroua and Laura Spica, a neighbor of the building collapse victims, who is also a member of two resident associations.<sup>4</sup>

With its familiar playing surface and paper money, the game plays similarly to traditional *Monopoly*. The board includes each property's name, address, value, and pictures showing the inadequate housing conditions. On some squares, a black band indicates that people have died at that particular site. Along with the game board, *Taudis-Poly* contains luck cards, local authority cards, banknotes bearing the imagery of Marseille monuments, pawns, and dice. Beyond the relocation from Atlantic City's streets to southern France, *Taudis-Poly* also departs from *Monopoly* in providing extensive contextual information about the housing and housing conditions depicted. Press articles and interviews with the inhabitants for each address accompany a booklet of rules. The game can be ordered or played virtually on the web, where players can also find short movies for each property.

*Taudis-Poly* deals with various forms of buildings that are unfit for human habitation: *bidonvilles* and *campements* (shantytowns and camps), *hotels meublés et garnis* (furnished hotels and furnished rooms), *habitat à loyer modéré insalubres* (insanitary low-rent housing), *noyaux villages en péril* (villages in danger),



Figure 2.5: The 2020 Housing Pharmacology exhibition by Samia Henni.

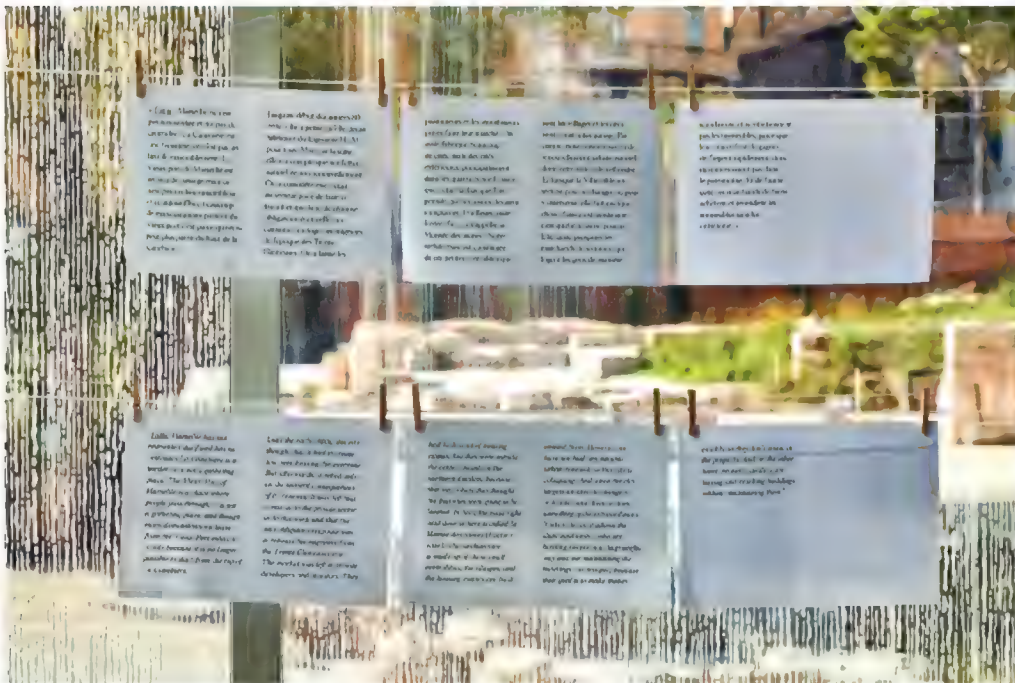


Figure 2.6: The 2020 Housing Pharmacology exhibition detail.



*immeubles de la ville en déperdition* (apartment buildings owned by the city in decline), *quartiers en ruine et effondrements* (ruined and collapsed buildings), *grandes copropriétés dégradées* (large degraded condominiums). It also features Baumettes Prison, a penitentiary named after a district in Marseille's ninth arrondissement. The board game features a selection of precarious housing estates in Marseille from between 2009 and 2019.

According to Bouaroua, "Until the early 1980s, this city [Marseille] thought that it had to create low-rent housing for everyone. But afterward, it relied only on the natural consequences of its renewal. It was felt that it was up to the private sector to do this work. The market was left to private developers and investors." Bouaroua argued that the lack of building maintenance and urban renewal led to the degradation of construction in the city center. He stated that "when the city targets an area to change it or to intervene there, it does something quite extraordinary: it lets it decay," and "property dealers are buying and reselling buildings without maintaining them. The value of buildings was very low for a long time."<sup>5</sup> In *Taudis-Poly*, the consequences of this laissez-faire approach are described and illustrated. The rule booklet also highlights the anger of the families of the victims and the people who were forcibly evacuated from their homes that happened to be in buildings that could collapse at any moment. This evacuated population was temporarily housed in furnished hotels or apartments, though for some, this temporary situation has continued for years.

In her interview, Laura Spica indicated that the experience of the collapse and evacuation generated a traumatic memory. Eager to better understand her psychological and physical condition, she spoke with her neighbors who had experienced the same deadly urban disaster. She stated, "My memory wasn't working properly. I was having recurring nightmares as well as forgetting important things and only remembering certain details. By talking to my neighbors, I noticed that the same thing was happening to them."

Laura and her neighbors created collectives and launched initiatives to comprehend the trauma and attempt to overcome it together. They organized workshops, talks, debates, roundtables, an open call for objects, and an open-air exhibition in La Rue du Musée (the Street Museum) in Noailles in September 2019. Laura argued that "the act of telling your story several times allows you to distance yourself from it and to reconstruct a coherent narrative in which this tear can be mended."<sup>6</sup> The association Noailles Debout invited inhabitants to vote on one of the objects exhibited to commemorate their collective trauma, and to offer it to the collection of the Museum of the History of Marseille. Together, they submitted a chain used to lock the entrance of one of the unfit buildings featured in *Taudis-Poly*.



# Hostile Architecture

## *Burgle Bros.*, Interdiction, and Spatial Politics

Rowan Tulloch



Figure 2.7: *Burgle Bros.* tiles function as a form of interdictory space.

In the mid-1990s, the urban design theorist Steven Flusty chronicled the rise of architectural strategies used to exclude and minimize public access to desirable areas of cities.<sup>1</sup> Flusty drew on the military notion of interdiction, where enemy positions and supply routes are targeted to delay and disorganize rather than stop entirely. For Flusty, interdictory spaces in architecture enable urban planners, designers, and building owners to promise the general public access but enact it in such a way that use becomes difficult or prohibitively inconvenient for subsections of that public.

Flusty was not the first to note this powerful exclusionary practice. Much has been written on the ways in which cities rely on practices we now term “hostile architecture” to corral the homeless, prevent loitering, and minimize perceived antisocial behaviors.<sup>2</sup> Flusty, however, goes a step further and offers a typology of these techniques. He describes five primary types of interdictory strategies, which he evocatively names *stealthy*, *slippery*, *crusty*, *prickly*, and *jittery* spaces. The 2015 tile-based board game *Burgle Bros.* demonstrates how all five of Flusty’s interdictory spaces are used in games. From this we can begin to conceptualize how such mechanics might allow game designers and theorists to explore processes of marginalization and exclusion.

*Burgle Bros.* is a cooperative bank heist game where players take on the role of elite thieves. In theme, the game evokes other popular media depictions of the heist genre. The game board is created by randomly laying out tiles in three separate 4 x 4 grids. Each tile represents a room of a specific type, and each grid represents one floor of the bank. The tiles stay facedown until the player moves on them or uses another skill to reveal them. Working as a team, players find and unlock a safe on each level of the bank while evading the patrolling guards. Players win if they reach the building’s roof with their stolen loot. Almost every tile in *Burgle Bros.* functions to delay or hamper the player in some way; in short, they are interdictory spaces.

For Flusty, *stealthy spaces* are hidden or camouflaged and therefore only easily accessible to those who are “in the know.” Urban courtyards, for example, are hypothetically open to all, but practically only known to privileged users. At its most basic, *Burgle Bros.* is a game of stealthy space: the destination (the safe on each level) is hidden, and the path to it unknown. *Slippery spaces* are visible but hard to access, benefiting those with specialized tools or knowledge: garden atriums, which can be seen through glass but accessed only through convoluted pathways, are one such example. In *Burgle Bros.*, one encounters many slippery spaces, from the roof exit that one needs to find to win the game to the locked rooms that require multiple turns to access. Entry to *crusty spaces* is blocked by walls, gates, guards, and checkpoints, and access requires the right password or key. The safes in *Burgle Bros.* are crusty spaces, as they need a combination to be unlocked before one can enter and steal the loot. *Prickly spaces* are ones that can be easily accessed but not comfortably occupied, like





Figure 2.8: Still frame from Spike Lee's 2006 heist film *Inside Man*.

seats in fast-food restaurants and public transport stops designed to prevent loitering. *Burgle Bros.* includes rooms that trigger alarms on entry and must be left promptly to avoid security. Finally, *jittery spaces* are those that cannot be used unobserved, directly or through increasingly ubiquitous CCTV surveillance. *Burgle Bros.* likewise has significant security with the always active guards, cameras, motion detection, and lasers.

The fun and thrill of *Burgle Bros.* comes from overcoming interdiction. Players navigate the mazelike spaces, narrowly avoiding security and risking everything for the loot. Reading the game through Flusty's lens, though, points to a political blind spot in gaming culture. For Flusty, interdiction is a strategy of power, used deliberately or unconsciously to block and discriminate. Interdictory spaces are a lived reality for a large number of people in the world: the homeless, the poor, and the marginalized, who are profiled, harassed, and excluded by police, security, and other systems of power. In games such as *Burgle Bros.*, however, we play with interdiction in a safe, fun, and largely depoliticized way.

Other media forms have found ways to tell compelling stories of struggle and powerlessness. With games, however, the perceived need for player agency makes sophisticated accounts of marginalization tricky.<sup>3</sup> Almost all games with a spatial element—world, map, path—feature interdiction in one form or another. In *Burgle Bros.*, it is easily seen, but other examples, like rolling doubles to get out of jail in *Monopoly*, are more subtle. The prevalence of interdiction shows that games could offer a complex and nuanced reflection of processes of exclusion and power through the core framing of their gameplay mechanics. Yet rarely do they follow this path. Interdiction is nearly always framed through a fantastical and romantically



Figure 2.9: Keypad tile from *Burgle Bros.* is a slippery space.



heroic lens: you are the conquering soldier, the hunted outsider, or in *Burgle Bros.* the world-class thief. Perhaps this desire for fantasy speaks to a need for catharsis, but the lack of games using real-world interdictory experiences also suggests a narrowness in gaming culture, which sees interdiction as fictional and escapist, rather than brutally mundane. This retreat to the fantastical frame for interdictory mechanics represents a missed opportunity for game designers, who could instead have mobilized these same interdictory mechanics to offer genuine social and political insight.

# Modeling Factional Urban History

## *Cross Bronx Expressway*

Chad Randl



Figure 2.10: Prototype game board for *Cross Bronx Expressway* set up to begin the 1965 scenario.

In 1980, New York City government workers started applying vinyl decals to the windows of more than five hundred abandoned apartment buildings throughout the Bronx. Depicting half-open shades and louvered shutters, the stickers were to provide a “lived-in look” and boost neighborhood morale as the city awaited federal rehabilitation funds. Instead they symbolized America’s crumbling urban housing and the failure of (depending on one’s viewpoint) government, the private sector, or residents themselves to address those conditions.<sup>1</sup> Yet the Bronx was always more complicated than the dystopian stereotypes represented in the national news and films like *Fort Apache*, *The Bronx*.

*Cross Bronx Expressway*, to be published by GMT Games in 2024, explores the circumstances and decisions that led the South Bronx from a poor but stable multiethnic neighborhood in the 1940s through its 1980s nadir to what the scholar Jill Jonnes calls a “resurrection” at the end of the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> The game’s designer, Non-Breaking Space, a pseudonym to keep his personal and professional life distinct from his design identity, lived in the Bronx for over two decades, witnessing many of the events covered in the game.

*Cross Bronx Expressway* extends a series of game mechanics developed for GMT’s counterinsurgency (COIN) series. COIN games highlight the military, political, economic, religious, and social factors that shape asymmetrical struggles, from the Gallic revolt against the Roman Empire (*Falling Sky*) to the decolonization of British India (*Gandhi*). They feature different factions, each with its own actions and victory conditions, vying for power, legitimacy, financial resources, and territory. A faction may assist another to further shared goals, but ultimately only one can win.

Players of *Cross Bronx Expressway* assume responsibility for one of three factions. The “community” player represents residents, small property and business owners, nonprofits, and gangs. Community succeeds by increasing activism, social coalitions, and self-determination; meeting social needs; and protecting its population from the correctional system. Government and public service entities like social workers and police are represented by the “public” faction. It must increase quality of life and protect the city’s solvency and reputation. The “private” faction takes up the interests of developers, banks, businesses, and large property owners. To win, it builds a workforce and economic coalitions and ensures a consistent revenue stream and the predominance of private enterprise. Each turn players undertake actions—building physical and organizational infrastructure, taking out loans, paying off bonds—that help their faction realize its vision for the South Bronx’s future.

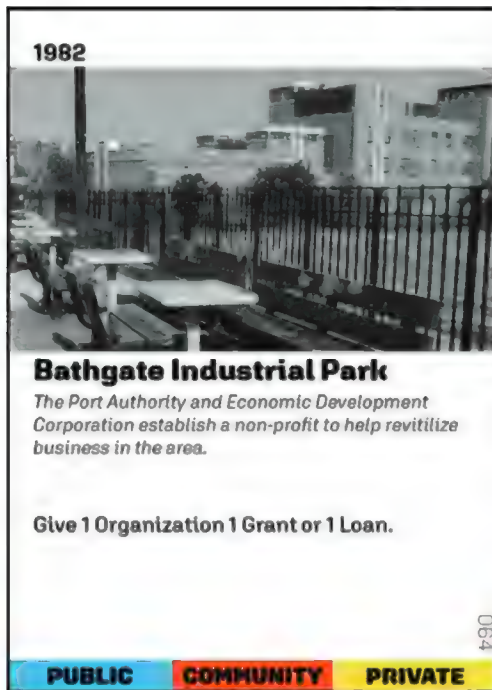


Figure 2.11: Prototype event card for *Cross Bronx Expressway*.



At its core, the game is about balancing self-interest and collaboration. The draft rule book describes it as “a socio-economic simulation in which the competing factions must manage their resources to achieve their goals while mitigating the societal effects of their decisions.” If two organizations are placed in the same locale, they become an economic or social coalition that increases the area’s strength and resilience. The game ends early with all factions losing if the number of “vulnerable” population lost to the prison system exceeds a specified limit. It also ends in a collective loss if the public and community factions go too far into debt, bankrupting the city. Recognizing that power and resources are not equally distributed in the Bronx, the game prompts each faction “to learn when and how to use what power they have first just to avoid losing. Only then can they think about their individual chance to win.”<sup>3</sup>

The game presents South Bronx history (including construction of its namesake highway) as exemplary of postwar urban processes and conflicts beyond just New York. The designer’s stated influences include Robert Caro’s *The Power Broker*, Jane Jacobs’s *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Kim Phillips-Fein’s *Fear City*, and Jonnes’s *South Bronx Rising*. Players become familiar with the history through an overview in an accompanying playbook and through contextual text on ninety event cards. More direct engagement emerges when players see the South Bronx from a factional perspective that may be far removed from their lived experience. When they act as a city official dealing with debt and scarcity, or as a developer concerned about a diminishing investment, or as residents determined to protect their homes, players have to make difficult decisions about the allocation of limited energies and resources and choose between short-term triage and long-term stabilization. According to Non-Breaking Space, “When you start making decisions yourself, you see why a historical decision was made.”

In recent decades, the United States has begun to grapple more fully with the legacy of those historical decisions. Hilary Ballon’s 2007 exhibition and book reassessed the reputation of city official Robert Moses as monolith and monster. Graduate programs at University of Oregon and University of Minnesota have partnered with local organizations to examine the heritage of marginalized communities affected by postwar renewal and highway projects in Portland and South Minneapolis. A growing number of American cities have committed to repairing the injury these projects caused to the socioeconomic, infrastructural, and cultural well-being of the communities involved.<sup>4</sup> *Cross Bronx Expressway* can contribute to such conversations and help forge deeper understandings of how cities evolved, what choices were available to those involved, and why they chose the moves they made.

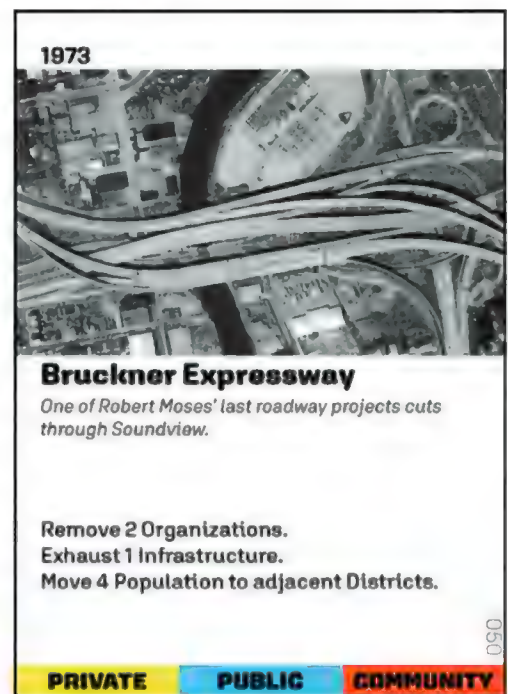


Figure 2.12: Prototype event card for *Cross Bronx Expressway*.





## **Landscapes (Real and Imagined)**





# Ground Rules

## Strategic Abstraction in *Terrace*

Justin Fowler



Figure 3.1: Still frame with *Terrace* game board from *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, season 7, episode 15, "Lower Decks" (1994).

An abstract prop floating on an illuminated tabletop in the Ten Forward lounge of the *Enterprise-D* in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. A checkers board in molded plastic relief. Chess pieces stripped of all attributes but relative size. Part ornament, part ambience, part field of battle.

Introduced at the 1992 International Toy Fair in New York, *Terrace* was the product of a partnership between inventor and marketer Buzz Siler and engineer Tony Dresden. While living in the Portland, Oregon, area, Siler had stumbled upon one of Dresden's "dormant" projects in 1988 and purchased a wooden prototype from the Dutch-born engineer.<sup>1</sup> Over the next few years, the two reworked the game to improve its playability, cut down on game time to appeal to modern audiences, and streamline its form, removing the frame from the original board design. Their aim was to develop complex gameplay from a minimal set of rules that uniformly governed the actions of each piece. Further, the "purpose was to transfer as much of the rules as possible from the verbal to the visual and intuitive," where board topography aided in the understanding, as pieces on the high ground were at an advantage on the attack.<sup>2</sup>

The four rules allowed for single moves up or down or fluid movement across vacant spaces and through allied pieces on each terrace. A piece could capture any piece of the same size or smaller on a downward diagonal move. The objective of the game was to capture one of your opponent's smallest pieces—inscribed with a *T*—or to move your *T*-piece to the lowest square across the board. Play style alternated between frenzied aggression and calculated escort mission, paving the way for the *T*-piece to travel across the topography by way of blocks and diversionary skirmishes.

The game's procedural minimalism and evenness of application promised accessibility. *Terrace*'s interplay of figure and ground produced a field defined by simple relationships of quantitative value—higher or lower; larger or smaller—that was also surprisingly ruthless despite the absence of narrative content. One of the most infamous tactics associated with the game's equal-or-lesser-than approach had players choosing to capture their own pieces to remove them as impediments on the field or as part of a larger strategy. Described as a "unique feature" of a game that eschewed features, the "cannibalism" move was a bloodless sacrifice that also suggested an analogy between capture and consumption that would resonate with the machinations of global capital in the post-Cold War moment of the game's debut.

Formally, *Terrace* was both distilled and eclectic. Its domed game pieces recalled the Mod styling of Siler's late-1960s-era band, X-25, the psychedelic interiors of Verner Panton's *Visiona 2*, or Robert Breer's glossy white mobile floats from Expo '70 in Osaka—art object precursors to the automated vacuums that would proliferate in domestic interiors in the early aughts. They seemingly prefigured the sinuous plasticity of "Y2K aesthetics," as manifest in everything from Alessi objects and Kartell furniture to early computer renderings of



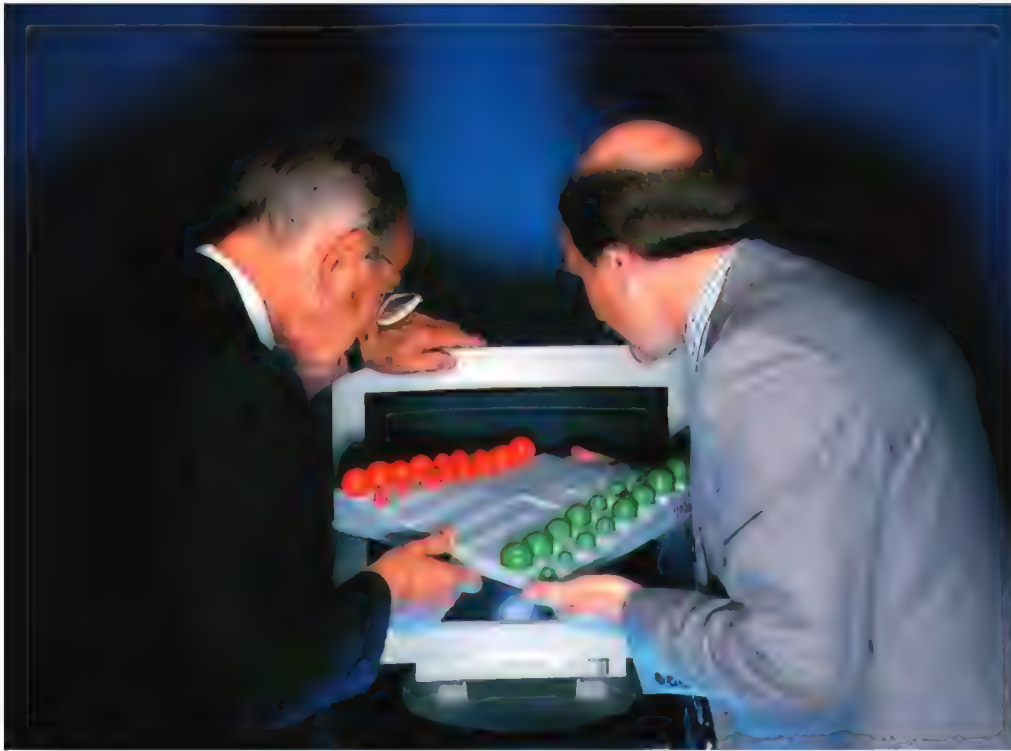


Figure 3.2: Promotional image for the computer edition of *Terrace* with Dresden and Siler (1994).

architectural environments by *Interrupted Projections*—era Neil Denari (Siler and Dresden would develop a computer version of *Terrace* in 1994). Yet the game also shared concerns that Frank Stella worked through in his Black Paintings from the late 1950s and the shaped canvases that followed. Stella was interested in eliminating extrinsic content from the work, as well as the problem of the canvas edge, which, in his view, was the place where most abstract expressionist works failed as their central gestural intensity dissolved.<sup>3</sup> Taking the canvas shape as the generator of a painting’s structural logic, Stella’s bands of black paint produced an evenness of intensity that was at once contained and expansive. As in most “abstract strategy games,” immediacy and rhythm supplant illustration or thematic narrative; each turn produces nested puzzles from the logic of the work’s form.<sup>4</sup>

Reinforcing this sense of immediacy, the more compact 6 x 6 variant of the 1997 game dropped players directly into the action, reducing the need for staging and advanced planning. Such moves anticipate the constricted action of online multiplayer “battle royale” gaming modes in *Fortnite*, PlayerUnknown’s *Battlegrounds*, and *Call of Duty: Warzone*. As with Stella’s paintings, the initial black-and-white (with red and blue for four-player variants) color scheme of *Terrace* would evolve into versions with orange, green, and purple pieces atop a light-gray game board. Likewise, as with Stella’s evocative and referential painting titles, a proliferation of content would sprout up around the game, from



Figure 3.3: Game box for the 6 x 6 edition of *Terrace* (1997).

newsletters and player-developed rule variants to a weeklong cruise for enthusiasts.

*Terrace*'s appearance as a recurring prop in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* was the most visible entry into this expanded universe, having caught the eye of the show's set director, Jim Meese.<sup>5</sup> Largely consigned to background appearances in personal quarters or played by extras in the *Enterprise* lounge, the game was more directly featured in the season 7 episode "Lower Decks." Focusing on the social relationships of junior members of the ship's crew and their shared anxieties during a performance review, the episode ended with the tragic sacrifice of one of their colleagues during a high-risk espionage mission to reduce the threat of large-scale war. Perhaps inadvertently mirroring the game, the episode thematized issues of rank, hierarchy, diversionary strategy, and the relation-

ships that cut across each. As *Terrace* embodied the rule-based order and perversely uniform inclusivity of Starfleet, so it was complemented in the episode by alternating scenes around the junior and senior officers' poker tables. Poker here was depicted as the more social vehicle, as the threat of a bluff was enabled by relationships that were not only formal but visible through a theater of tells or from hunches based on the experience of past behaviors and personal histories.

Playing one game off the other in a battle of form against theater, "Lower Decks" lays bare the human limitations of each, enacting critique through friction. While this rhetorical critique went unanswered, *Terrace* did gain some friction by way of a layered foam rubber game board introduced in its final 6 x 6 iteration. The material substitution offered traction for pieces that tended to slip during play.<sup>6</sup>

# ***Uranium Rush***

## **The Radioactive Gimmick**

Emily Blair



Figure 3.4: *Uranium Rush* game box.



*Uranium Rush* appeared in 1955, as prospectors flocked westward in search of the newly sought-after resource. A decade earlier, when the United States first developed the atomic bomb using uranium from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (then the Belgian Congo), combined with smaller amounts from Colorado and Canada, the element was falsely believed to be scarce. Now that the Soviets had produced their own nuclear weapons, the United States poured money into discovering uranium at home, declaring the Atomic Energy Commission sole consumer and offering large bonuses to those who found the element on private or public land. Just as families were encouraged to build fallout shelters as a contribution to the Cold War, so they were encouraged to spend a fun weekend hunting for uranium. Prospecting handbooks proliferated, and “uranium fever” served as the plot for B movies and television comedy episodes.

*Uranium Rush* capitalized on this hype, along with the general enthusiasm for atomic energy, the discovery of which was a source of national pride to many, despite the horrific destruction it had caused and continued to threaten. Americans sought to harness the mysterious whirling atom not only for weaponry and the development of nuclear power but also for jewelry, comic books, and dish detergent. It appears on the cover of the *Uranium Rush* box, along with a seal stating that the game is “educator approved” and an exhortation to “Make a Million Dollars!” Children could learn science and entrepreneurship all at once, aspiring to become either “uraniumaires” like famous prospector Charlie Steen or, failing that, nuclear physicists.

Intertwining fantasies of technological and geographic dominance are personified by the young white cowboy striding across the *Uranium Rush* box cover. With a giant, rocket-like Geiger counter casually tucked under his elbow, he sets off to claim the untapped power of the American West, a region perpetually portrayed as an unoccupied “frontier.” The game board inside presents a scenic landscape, presumably the Colorado Plateau, pocked with shallow holes that represent mines. After spinning an arrow to determine where to prospect, players pay the government to stake a claim, which can be traded before being tested for uranium. Each lucky strike pays \$50,000, and the player with the most money when all claims have been staked wins. “Government instruction cards” detail various setbacks and strokes of luck familiar from the Western adventure genre, and from the wild accounts that famous prospectors such as Vernon Pick gave in popular magazines.<sup>1</sup>

Unlike some Geiger counters included in science kits from the era, the toy version in *Uranium Rush* does not detect radiation but instead features a light and buzzer that activate when a wire is touched to the correct mines. Wielding this oversize tool, players

Figure 3.5: The 1954 *Uranium Prospectors' Handbook* depicts prospecting as recreation.





Figure 3.6: Game board, Geiger counter, and pieces included in *Uranium Rush*.

discover the landscape to be a circuit board, crackling with potential energy and exciting, though elusive, knowledge—the electric light itself having long been used to represent a new idea. Because the pattern of lucky strikes is determined by which of four metal posts the Geiger counter rests on, a player can memorize which claims to stake; the game board takes on the same disposable quality the US government seemed to ascribe to western land itself.

Even for less attentive players, the initial thrill of this “exciting new electric game for the family” seems likely to have been short-lived. The game’s Geiger counter exemplifies the gimmick, a form described by the cultural theorist Sianne Ngai as intrinsic to capitalism: the quick fix that turns out to be neither. In *Uranium Rush*, the player reenacts the tedious work of finding resources to fuel the insatiable nation, using a device that promises to make the task easy and fun. Claiming to educate, the gimmick instead obscures and mystifies. Ngai characterizes the gimmick as the site of multiple contradictions, mixing “dissatisfaction” and “fascination,” “overperforming and underperforming,” appearing “too expensive or too cheap,” “too new or too old.”<sup>2</sup> In the end, it is hard to know whether such gimmicks are more instructive of the logic of capitalism in their initial appeal or in their eventual failure to enchant.

The “quick fix” of uranium, with its odd mixture of futuristic technology and frontier mythology, is one that has failed the American West and its people again and again. The boom that inspired *Uranium Rush* turned to bust, as the Atomic Energy Commission, having procured an immense stockpile, withdrew



its support, leaving behind economic and environmental ruin. Long aware of the dangers of radon gas exposure but reluctant to endanger the supply of uranium, the federal government disregarded reports by its own Public Health Service and placed the burden of regulation on ill-equipped individual states, resulting in death and illness for many who worked in underground mines. To this day, hundreds of abandoned mines have not been properly cleaned up, and local people, in particular the Diné (Navajo) community, who were responsible for mining over half of the uranium obtained in this period, continue to suffer from uranium poisoning, increased lung illness, and cancer.<sup>3</sup> As the writer Robert Johnson points out, secrecy has been an integral part of “the atomic mindset” since the Manhattan Project, and countless people all over the world, harmed by nuclear testing, medical experiments, or the processes of extraction and milling, only learned of their exposure to radioactivity years after the fact.<sup>4</sup> While the uncanny optimism of games like *Uranium Rush* may thus seem unfathomable to us today, struggle over western land, its resources, and our understanding of nuclear power continues.



# Mountainous Ambitions

## Himalayan Board Games and the British Empire

Ruth W. Lo



Figure 3.7: K2: *Broad Peak*'s 2011 game board and components.

Mountaineering, especially Himalayan expeditions, has long been a popular board game theme. Among the most well-known contemporary games is *K2*, in which the players compete to reach the summit of the second-highest mountain on Earth. Himalayan-themed games originated in twentieth-century England as British expeditions to Mount Everest stirred popular fascination with its height and sublime landscape. To attract buyers in an already competitive board game market, manufacturers rushed out titles like *Mount Everest* (1922), *Everest Mountain Climb* (1950s), and *Everest* (1961) after notable expeditions generated headlines and penetrated the public consciousness. Companies marketed many of the games to children, encouraging them to assume the role of explorers by emphasizing adventure in nature and celebrating British achievement through a race to the top. What the manufacturers did not make explicit, however, was the ways in which these board games embodied British geopolitical ambitions and militaristic expansions. The games' wholesome and edifying presentation masked the colonial aims of the British Empire, which included the expropriation of the Indian frontier and its power struggle with the Russian Empire in Central and South Asia.

Himalayan-themed games developed from earlier Alpine ones when mountaineering became fashionable among the educated middle class in nineteenth-century England. While some games like Chad Valley's *Everest* and Remploy's

Figure 3.8: Game box, board, and pieces from the 1922 game *Mount Everest*.







Figure 3.9: Box, magnetized mountain (that folds into 3D form), components, and book for *Mt. Everest: 3 Dimensional Game*.

*Everest Mountain Climb* were based on chance with the roll of a die, other games involved skill and had game boards that distinguished the mountaineering theme on the market. J&L Randall's *Everest*, for example, had a three-dimensional board with holes to attach plastic spikes and ledges. Rather than working alone, its climbers were strung together with threads, so that one climber's action affected the performance of the team—a design that more closely resembles the teamwork necessary in real-life mountaineering. History has glorified individual feats, especially those of Western climbers, while overlooking the significant contributions of Himalayan Sherpas, Bhutias, and porters.

While these games emphasized the way mountaineering simultaneously cultivated physical strength and a curiosity about nature, they obscured the historical and political implications of climbing in the British Empire. Unlike Alpine mountaineering, Himalayan mountaineering was inextricably tied to British colonialism. Expeditions to the Greater Ranges of Asia—including the Himalaya, the Karakoram, the Hindu Kush, and others—were initially organized to establish and survey British land possessions and fend off enemies. Early explorers like Francis Younghusband and George Mallory were military officers as well as members of the Royal Geographical Society and the Great Trigonometrical Survey, two principal organizations that arranged and financed expeditions. Both organizations mapped and gridded the British Empire, acting on an Enlightenment impulse that ostensibly sought scientific precision and deeper geographic knowledge but in reality served to claim territories and confirm boundaries.



Himalayan mountaineering game manufacturers did not contextualize Britain's race to the top in geopolitical terms. Instead they focused on reaching the summit while facing "natural" setbacks, such as bad weather, illness, and disorientation. The games concealed the militaristic origins of British Himalayan expeditions, in which the trips were framed by the media with words like "conquest," "assault," "attack," "combat," "reconnaissance," "triumph," and "defeat." A seemingly guileless focus on nature in these games effectively obscured the crucial objectives of the "sport" in the Himalaya: the British colonization of Indian land and people, as well as a territorial confrontation with the Russian Empire. Interestingly, a 1955 American game, *Mt. Everest*, produced by Samuel Gabriel Sons eight years after India gained independence, included an educational pamphlet that repeated the kind of colonial rhetoric that was glaringly absent in earlier British-produced games.

Unlike games that taught children the obvious mechanisms of colonization such as the seizure of materials and land, Himalayan mountaineering games operated on the subconscious, normalizing colonialism and military diplomacy through the playful reenactment of climbing. Marketing ploys such as three-dimensional game boards, coupled with the manufacturers' avoidance of the political context surrounding Himalayan mountaineering, made the games appear to be simply about exploration. But the political genesis of Himalayan mountaineering—that it was not entirely a sport like Alpine climbing—calls into question the neutral playfulness of these games and prompts consideration of their cultural meaning and ideological function. Their appeal rested precisely in their marked difference from geographical games of conquest in which children played soldiers and merchants; here they are intrepid mountain enthusiasts with a sense of adventure. The nature in Himalayan mountaineering games thus served to naturalize imperial ambitions, and the sublime became the subliminal message with which to inculcate British children through play.

Political maneuvering disguised as recreational play continued to characterize later games. Two examples are the less ambiguous titles *Conquer Everest* (1975) and *Assault on Mt. Everest* (1976); both appear on the current list of "Top Ten Mountain Climbing Games" on the BoardGameGeek website. This brings up further questions about the enduring popularity of mountaineering-themed games, especially of Himalayan expeditions. Manufacturers continue to emphasize the race-to-the-top and battle-against-nature aspects of Himalayan mountaineering while disregarding the geopolitical origins of these games and their theme, essentially reproducing the strategies British game publishers initiated a century ago.

# The Winding Road to *Catan*

Mark Morris



Figure 3.10: *Settlers of Catan* board game setup with resource and development cards; dice; and road, house, and city pieces.



Since its German debut in 1995, *The Settlers of Catan* has been a phenomenal hit and garnered worldwide critical praise. *Catan*'s success as a dice-rolling, card-playing board game is all the more notable, as it ran parallel to developments of map-based strategy computer games. Created by the retired dental technician turned award-winning game designer Klaus Teuber, *Catan* is that rare thing: a fast-paced and intuitive game with lots of complexity and strategy options. The game board features an island composed of nineteen randomly drawn hexagonal map portions, each depicting natural resources (grain, lumber, brick, ore, wool) set in an oceanic frame. The object of the game is to build the most successful colony on the island. Rolls of dice trigger resource yields based on number correspondence to the map pieces. Gathering resources along with development cards permits settlements and then cities to build up (marked by little *Monopoly*-like buildings). Roads are laid along hexagonal edges linking town to town. Coastal ports are marked out and generate returns if you control them. There is an assigned mischief-maker in the form of *Catan*'s "robber," who steals cards and stanches resource yields when landed on a map portion. Victory points are awarded per settlement and city, for the longest continuous road, and for the largest army; reaching ten points wins the game (and earns lifelong enemies).

*Catan* evolved out of Teuber's interest in Iceland and Viking sagas. Claiming portions of an uninhabited island (helpfully without any indigenous peoples to fret over) and setting up petty states, each trying to outdo the other à la *Game of Thrones*, makes for satisfying escapism. And, yes, one of the many spin-offs is a *Game of Thrones: Catan—Brotherhood of the Watch*. The island pieces are just numerous and diverse enough to offer new points of juxtaposition and opportunity per game. The resource tiles and painted wood houses are, if anything, underdesigned. It is the characteristic winding roads that dominate the look of the thing after gameplay is well established. These colored matchsticks are the lifelines of the island's economy and key to everyone's success. The cards bring much of *Catan*'s world-building aspect to the fore: the game's hidden narrative allure. Somehow *Catan* hits a sweet spot between the dice-driven *Risk* and *Dungeons & Dragons*, not to mention video games like *Age of Empires* and Sid Meier's *Civilization*, which only shifted to hexagonal maps in 2010.

Despite its island setting, *Catan* is no dreamy Utopia. At its heart it is a study of colonialism and capitalism. Warfare is not central; standing armies are off-board and held in collected cards. The game nimbly avoids any moral ambiguity by using an abstract fantasy setting. The cards vaguely suggest European settlement of a virgin territory; the vegetation implies some place warmer than Iceland. Unlike many other exploration-themed games, *Catan*'s landscape is entirely revealed from the start, but the disposition of the map pieces is refreshingly new each game session. Settlers do not waste time uncovering hidden resources. Forests, fields of miraculously cultivated wheat, pastures of sheep



(from where?), brickyards, mountains bursting with ore—all appear for immediate claiming and exploiting. Building cities and linking them with roads using wood and stone resources is where most of the time goes. Were *Catan*'s landscape recognizable as a real place on earth, the game's narrative would be complicated by questions, not just of colonialism, but of resource depletion and environmental degradation in the name of human development, but such questions would spoil the fun.

Numerous special edition and anniversary versions of the game have appeared over the last quarter century—a novel inspired by *Catan* loops back to Iceland—and there are the popular online and mobile versions as well. What is charming about the digital versions is how painstakingly they reproduce the look and feel of the analog board game. Expansion packs offer enough map portions to create continents and archipelagos. The most compelling visual iteration to date is *Catan 3D*, offered in a carved wooden trunk no less, where the hexagonal pieces get a hand-painted sculptural treatment with extruded mountain ranges, spiky forests, undulating fields of barley, adorable bumpy sheep on windswept hills. Teuber used his dentistry skills to create the original models for these. His first successful game, *Barbarossa* (1988), had players sculpting characters from modeling clay. *Catan 3D* meets up with the legion of homespun boards and pieces that speak to the many ways players identify with the game and value its social underpinning. Three to four players are required to play the standard game, so a double date at the hobby store is in the offing. The universal appeal of *Catan*—some twenty-five million copies have been sold around the globe—may be found in its hallmark analogueness, its inclusiveness (no players are eliminated during gameplay, and the rules are



Figure 3.11: Woodcut illustration by Ambrosius Holbein of the island from Thomas More's *Utopia*, 1518.

straightforward enough that younger or inexperienced players can jump in and thrive), and its brevity. Most games of *Catan* conclude in about an hour.

Every island configuration of classic *Catan* includes a one-off desert tile from which the mysterious robber emerges. Unlike other tiles, the desert does not offer any natural resource, nor does it produce any commodity. It is a no-man's-land around which everything else swirls. *The Settlers of Catan* is, in turn, that object on a table around which everyone debates and schemes in real time with real people. As John Donne reminds, "No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main." Like the best of board games, *Catan* brings people together. The prizes, including the Spiel des Jahres award, that Teuber has collected speak to the strength of *Catan* as an exemplar of a new generation of products designed in Europe that have revitalized the board game market. *Catan* is often described as a "gateway game" to the more complex games of this type. Gateway or otherwise, its capacity to easily translate and be adapted has helped make it a classic with an enviable following.

Figure 3.12: Game board and components for *Catan 3D*.





# ***Blokus***

## **From Ornament to Territory**

David Salomon

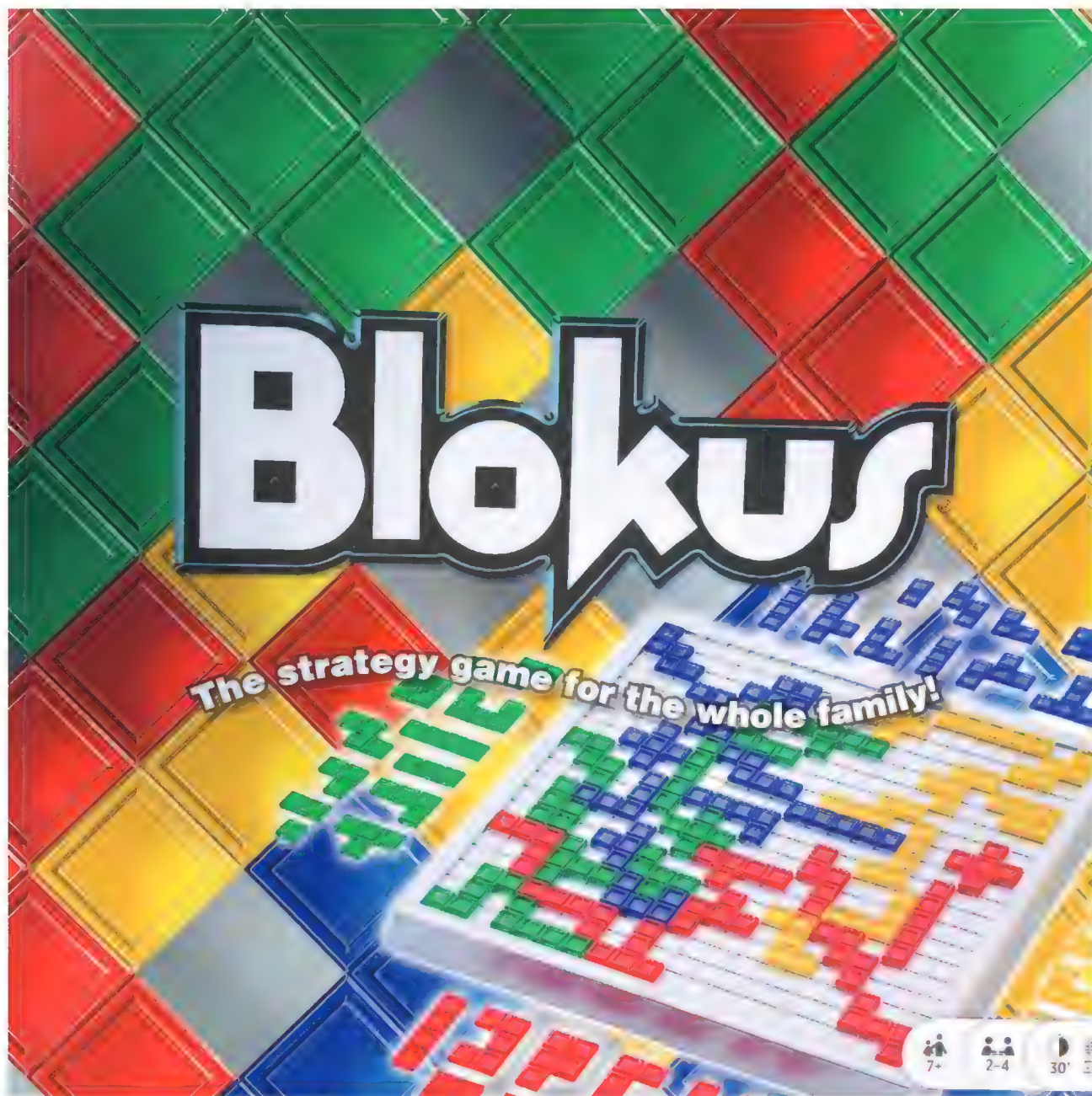


Figure 3.13: *Blokus* game box.



*Blokus* is marketed as a mentally stimulating, strategic, fun-for-all-ages game. Created by the mathematician Bernard Tavitian, it was first released in 2000 and won a Mensa Select award in 2004. Its gridded board and polyomino pieces link it to the history of mathematically themed games popularized in the 1950s. It is also related to the geometry of symmetry and to the tiling or tessellation of surfaces with similarly shaped pieces. These in turn connect *Blokus* to the history of architectural ornament and design and attempts to integrate them with science. In other words, like many a good game, *Blokus* belongs to the worlds of social relationships and cultural history.

The game is territorial in nature. The goal is to fit as many of your pieces on the board as you can. There are very few rules. Each player must start in one of the four corners of the square board. In subsequent moves, each piece added must be in contact with a piece of that player's color, but pieces can only touch at a corner, never along a side. The game ends when no player can place a piece on the board, and the winner is the one with the fewest number of polyomino cells left in their hand.

*Blokus* belongs to the twentieth-century history of polyomino games. A polyomino is a shape made up of identically sized squares. Whereas other games use only one size of polyomino (e.g., *Tetris* uses tetrominoes), in *Blokus* each player has a variety of them, specifically: one monomino, one domino, two trominoes, five tetrominoes, and twelve pentominoes. Although known and used in puzzles and ornaments previously, the term *polyomino* was coined and copyrighted by Solomon Golomb in the 1950s. Golomb was an influential mathematician, communication sci-

entist, and professor of electrical engineering. His research—which won him a National Medal of Science—was central to the development of cellular phones. These polyomino games were popularized by Martin Gardner via his column in *Scientific American* in the 1950s and '60s. They subsequently became the subject of scholarly study in math and computer science.

A number of artists and scientists in the 1950s and '60s shared Golomb's overlapping interest in mathematics, communication, tiling, and technology. These included György Kepes, Arthur Loeb, Buckminster Fuller, and Cyril Stanley Smith, all of whom saw patterns—in ornamental tiles, in molecular structures, in abstract art—as a bridge between the "two cultures" of art and science. The science fiction author Arthur C. Clarke was also a devotee of polyominoes. A scene from his and Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* had an astronaut playing a digital pentomino tiling game against HAL. It was ultimately cut

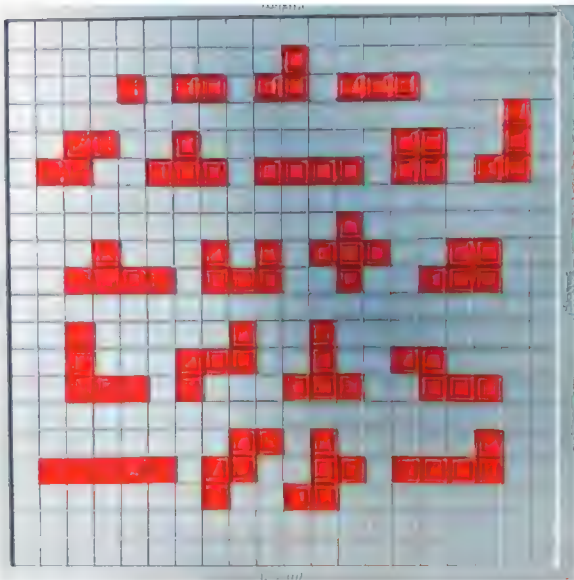


Figure 3.14: Twenty-one polyomino game pieces from *Blokus*.

from the film, replaced with a scene showing the two characters playing chess. However, stills from the deleted scene were included on the box of *Parker Brothers Pentomino Game: Universe*. Swapping out what the box called “the game of the future” for chess in the film suggests the tension between an old, recognizable past and an unimaginable future. While both games are structured around grids, the tiled pentominoes of *Universe* reinforce a posthuman digital structure, whereas chess remains rooted in a humanist past. In architecture, this tension between the abstract and the corporeal is evident in contemporaneous projects such as Superstudio’s *Continuous Monument* and Archizoom’s *No-Stop City*. Both challenge, if not parody, the seemingly neutral value of grids and the place of bodies within them.

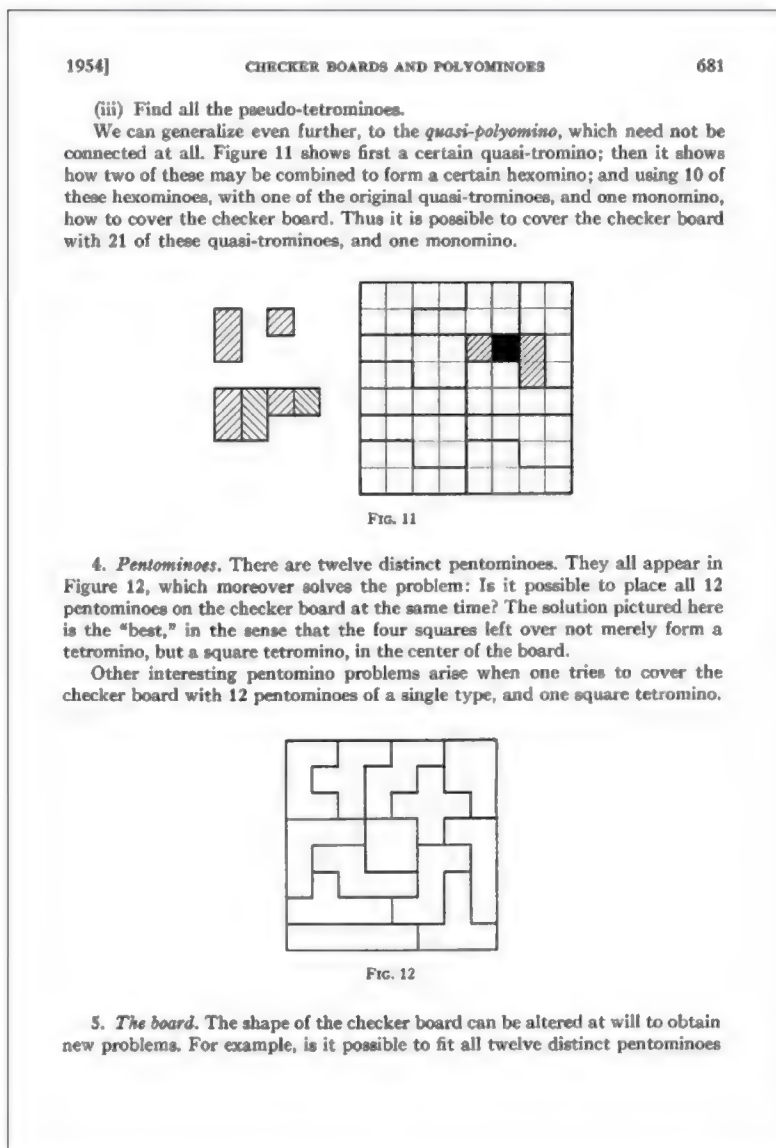


Figure 3.15: Page from Solomon Golomb’s article “Checker Boards and Polyominoes,” *American Mathematical Monthly*, December 1954.

But grids and polyominoes wouldn't go away. Two decades later, the popularity of *Tetris* propelled the success of Nintendo's 1989 release of its Game Boy and prefigured the explosion of handheld digital gaming. It also foreshadowed the invention of *Blokus*. The first color version of *Tetris* for the Game Boy was introduced in 1998; *Blokus* was released two years later. The goal of *Tetris* is to create a perfectly tiled plane with no gaps between the pieces. This is consistent with the nondigital polyomino games that Golomb and Gardner popularized in the 1950s. It is also consistent with the symmetrical, tightly packed tessellations that Loeb and others studied the mathematics of. The swerve that *Blokus* introduces is to reject this criteria in favor of less regular, less predictable outcomes, outcomes that are the result of competitive and strategic operations. Unpredictable outcomes are the result of a rigid set of rules and infrastructures, a nice analogy for the computationally driven globalization of the 1990s and 2000s that gave birth to *Blokus*.

The return of the random, the tactile, the territorial, and the social might mark *Blokus* as retro or even resistant in an era that de-emphasized borders and emphasized the flow of goods, people, and information. However, this return is neither triumphant nor complete. Digital games and computationally based commerce remain ubiquitous. *Blokus* itself has easily been adapted to the digital realm, and it can and has been analyzed mathematically. While its sensorial affects and new rules swerve away from the strict algorithms of symmetry and computer codes, it remains a child of them.

One course, one doesn't need to know any of this to play or to enjoy *Blokus*. One doesn't need to know the game's relationship to math, its relationship to ornament, or modernist aesthetics, or attempts to unify the arts and sciences, or the postmodernist critique of grids, or the rise of globalization and computer games. One doesn't need to have played *Tetris* or to understand what a polyomino is. After all, it's a game seven-year-olds can play. Nevertheless, when you hold those shiny tiles in your hand and click them into the game's raised grid, you are literally embodying those histories: histories that expose the invisible influences that stealthily structure even our most innocent of experiences.





# Historiography in Space

## Approaches in Commercial Wargame Board Design

Maurice Suckling

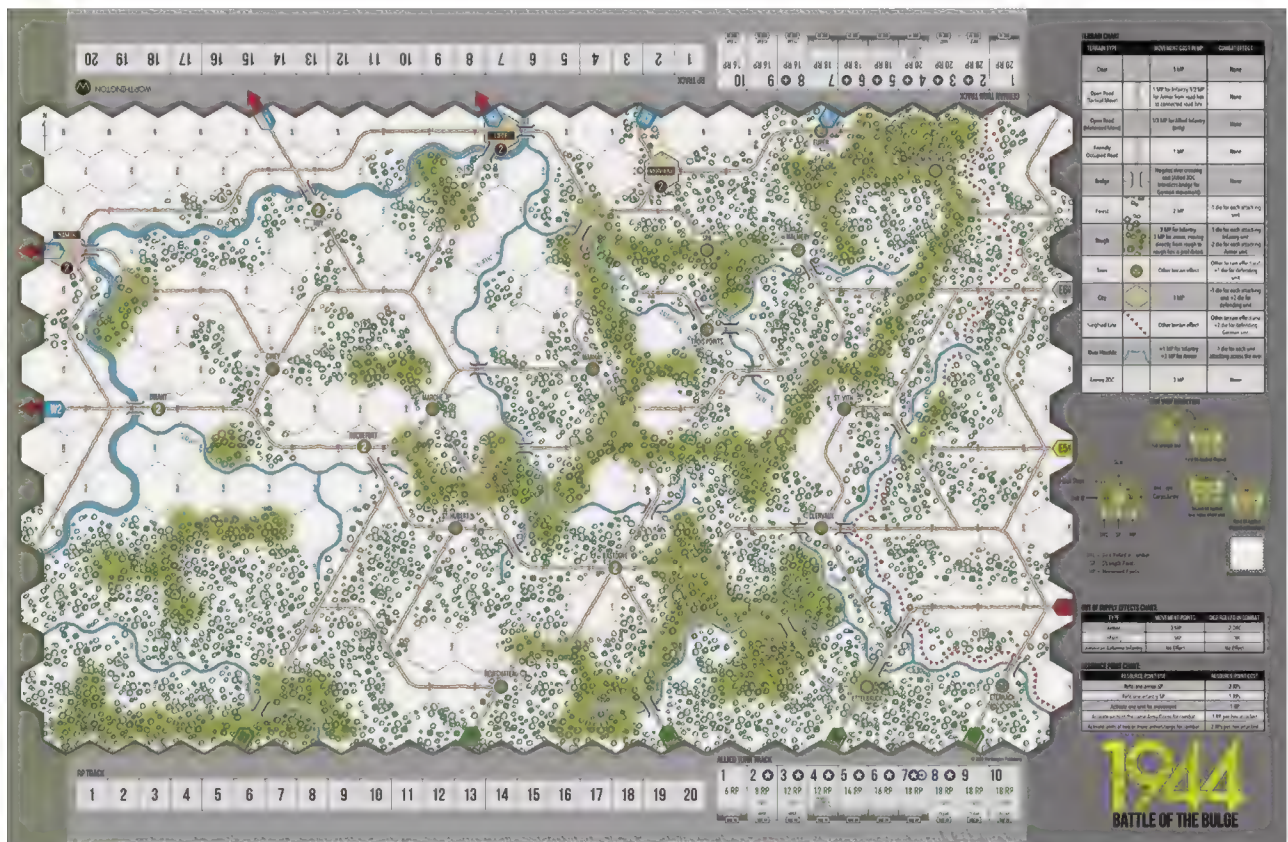


Figure 3.16: Regulated hex grids in *Battle of the Bulge* 1944.

Humans have long sought ways to become better at and play at war in controlled settings. Children push model soldiers across dirt patches or bedroom floors, converted in their minds to battlefields. H. G. Wells formalized such games with his 1913 book *Little Wars: A game for boys from twelve years of age to one hundred and fifty and for that more intelligent sort of girl who like boys' games and books*. The early nineteenth-century Prussian military used a scaled block game, *Kriegsspiel*, to experiment with new tactics and train young officers.<sup>1</sup>

In the decades after World War II, a commercial wargame market emerged in the United States that permitted players to re-create past battles as well as sci-fi and fantasy conflicts. The wargame's components—cardboard pieces representing individual soldiers or entire corps, rule books and charts to interpret die rolls, surfaces representing fields of operation—shaped these encounters. A central challenge in wargaming has been how to compress and scale an often vast battlefield to a finite play space—in commercial wargames, the cardboard



Figure 3.17: Irregular areas in *Victoria Cross II: Battle of Isandlwana & Rorke's Drift*.



or paper map that constitutes the playing surface. How that surface was organized had implications for how games frame historical situations, what assumptions they make, and what options they allow players for exploring historical scenarios. Designers adopted three primary spatial strategies: regulated grids, irregular areas, and point-to-point.

The most common regulated scale play space is the hex grid. Pivotal designer Charles S. Roberts popularized hexagonal grids in the 1960s after seeing them used in a RAND Corporation (a US global policy think tank) wargame developed for the US government.<sup>2</sup> Earlier wargames had subdivided space into square grids or controlled movement through the use of tape measures stretched across sculpted sand or other surfaces. By the 1970s, hex grids had become the standard model of regulating space in commercial wargames. Historiographically, grids suggest that space is scalable, potentially knowable and traversable, and has definable topographical features with calculable effects and meanings. Regulated grids offer players space, and therefore history, that can be controlled and (at least theoretically) known in detail, with varied possibilities for navigating it. With the sense of distance that comes with regulated space also comes a sense of time: how long it takes to move through space can have a meaningful reference to the real world.

Irregular areas will be familiar to anyone who knows *Risk* (1959) or *Diplomacy* (1959). This design approach often retains recognizable geographic or geopolitical representations, like nations and other sub- or transnational regional territories, such as mountain ranges. What matters in this design approach is what control of the region represents, and how regions connect within a holistic network of spaces. Irregular areas tell players that land can be divided in such ways as to denote broad strategic regional or situational importance, perhaps dominated by cities (*Diplomacy*), or otherwise suggestive of the value of the land regardless of any explicit urban control (*Risk*). Although such games tend to be strategic level in focus (showing a large scale), there are also examples of tactical-level (small-scale) games such as *Victoria Cross II: Battle of Isandlwana & Rorke's Drift* (2011), where redoubts and buildings carry specific meanings in the game's context.

The ways that regions connect to each other encodes them with a relational significance. On the standard *Risk* board, for example, the Indonesia space is a gateway going north between Siam and the whole of Asia, and, going south and east, between New Guinea and Western Australia. Given the value the game places on completing sets of regions, this imbues both Indonesia and Siam with particular strategic value. Historiographically, irregular areas provide space, and again history, freed from strictly scaled distance measurements (asking us: why does scale matter?) that can emphasize relational qualities between places (showing us that relational qualities matter).

Point-to-point spatial configurations date to the 1970s. A point-to-point map distills the playable space depicted on the game board into the key locations relevant to the topic in question; in wargames these are most often towns, cities, forts, and other places of definable strategic significance. Points are usually connected to each other via lines, typically representing roads, trails, railroads, rivers, and sea lanes. The system channels play along historically bound axes through these points, thereby emphasizing their significance. Areas of little or no historical relevance to the game are absent or marginalized with few nodal connections. These maps offer markedly limited and knowable possibilities, distilling movement, and thus history, into definable channels of feasible outcomes. Point-to-point space differs from irregular areas in its emphasis on nodal connections that are decoupled from strictly scaled regional proximity and its tendency to model specific meanings in relation to spaces. So, on the board of *Hidden Strike: American Revolution* (2021), the British force pool (Britain) is as close to Canada as it is to the Southern Colonies, yet there is no single sea region to control; instead there are numerous different fleet "points" that American forces must contest to impede British movement.

Whether board wargames frame it as a set of nodes and connections, six-sided planes, or varied zones, space always carries historiographic weight. Its arrangement on the board is embedded with assumptions that help determine a game's narrative, options, and outcomes. Wargame space is always suggesting something about history and how we might interpret it.

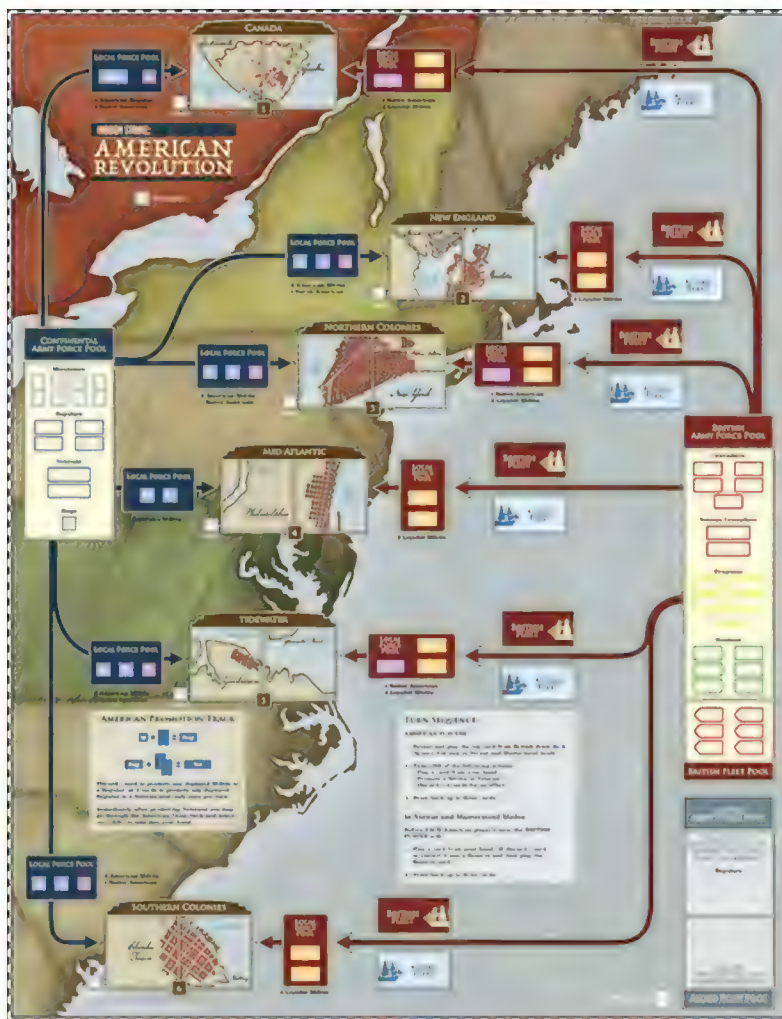


Figure 3.18: Point-to-point design in *Hidden Strike: American Revolution*.







## Icons





# Building for the Ages

## Egyptian-Themed Board Games

Bob Brier



Figure 4.1: Queen Nefertari playing senet.

Moments of Egyptomania abound in western history: Napoleon's 1798 invasion of Egypt and the scientific expedition that accompanied it; nineteenth century Egyptian Revival architecture; and Howard Carter's 1922 discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb, followed by the 1970s blockbuster world tour of artifacts from the tomb and celebrated in Steve Martin's fabulous novelty song "King Tut." Twenty-first century Euro-style board games with Egyptian themes confirm an ongoing cultural fascination with these ancient dynasties, their pharaohs, and monuments.

Ancient Egyptians were early board game players. Among the most popular games was *senet*, which means "passing" in ancient Egyptian, perhaps because players had to overtake their opponent's pieces on the way to completing a journey around the board. The game must have been extremely popular; there are numerous paintings showing the deceased playing *senet* in the next world, including in the tomb of Queen Nefertari, the wife of Ramses the Great.

Modern Egypt-themed board games have little to do with *senet*, but they do show us how contemporary gamers view Egyptian culture and architecture. One of the more interesting is *Imhotep* (2016), named after a royal architect or "overseer of the works" who lived 4,500 years ago and built the Step Pyramid of Saqqara for his pharaoh, King Zoser. *Imhotep*'s players assume the role of royal architects building four types of monuments: pyramids, temples, tombs, and obelisks. After six rounds, the player with the most pyramids and obelisks, the most complete tomb, and the most stones in place wins. To a great extent, a pharaoh's legacy depended on his building projects, so the game has it right. In the process of abstraction that accompanies all game development, designers made several concessions to gameplay over historical accuracy. For example, players compete for stone from the quarry, docking space at the sites, and the ability to unload stones quickly. In ancient Egypt, there would have been no such

Figure 4.2: A player mat from *Imhotep* depicts far fewer laborers than were actually required to raise an obelisk.





competition. Every monument was constructed at the pharaoh's command; all efforts were coordinated toward a single outcome.

*Imhotep* also distills the complicated process of quarrying, transporting, and erecting ancient Egyptian architecture. Players build obelisks by bringing stone cubes from the quarry on a barge and then stacking them atop one another at the site. In reality, obelisks are monolithic shafts of stone weighing around 350 tons. It wasn't just "quarry a small block, load on barge, transport to site, unload, repeat." Monuments were not always built out of the same type of stone. The Great Pyramid of Giza is made of all kinds of stones, ranging from 2.5-ton limestone blocks to 30-ton granite stones that did not all come from the same quarry. The game's depiction of a building site shows a half-dozen workers raising an obelisk by pulling on ropes. Historical evidence confirms that hundreds of laborers were required to set upright even a modest-sized obelisk.

In *Amun-Re* (2003), players are not mere master builders; they are pharaohs competing to build the greatest pyramids. The game successfully depicts how the ability to construct pyramids depended on the cultivation of land along the Nile. Each year, around July, the Nile flooded, depositing rich, black topsoil on its banks. This soil was perfect for growing grains and other crops, and the nutrients were replaced every year by the next inundation. Egypt could grow more food than it needed, enabling the pharaoh to support the thousands of laborers who built the pyramids. These were not slaves, as in the movies, but workers.

Victory in *Amun-Re* depends on how many farmers the player can "buy" to work the province he or she bought at auction. This in turn determines how large the harvest will be, and thus how much gold the players will have to fund their pyramids. Mirroring Egyptian beliefs and cultural practices, success in the game is also determined by how many offerings players make to the god Amun-Re. The pharaoh built temples to the gods and made offerings, hoping to be rewarded with a high Nile, victory in battle, and other blessings. This attention to detail is also evident in the border that surrounds the game box: hieroglyphics that say "Loading the ship!"

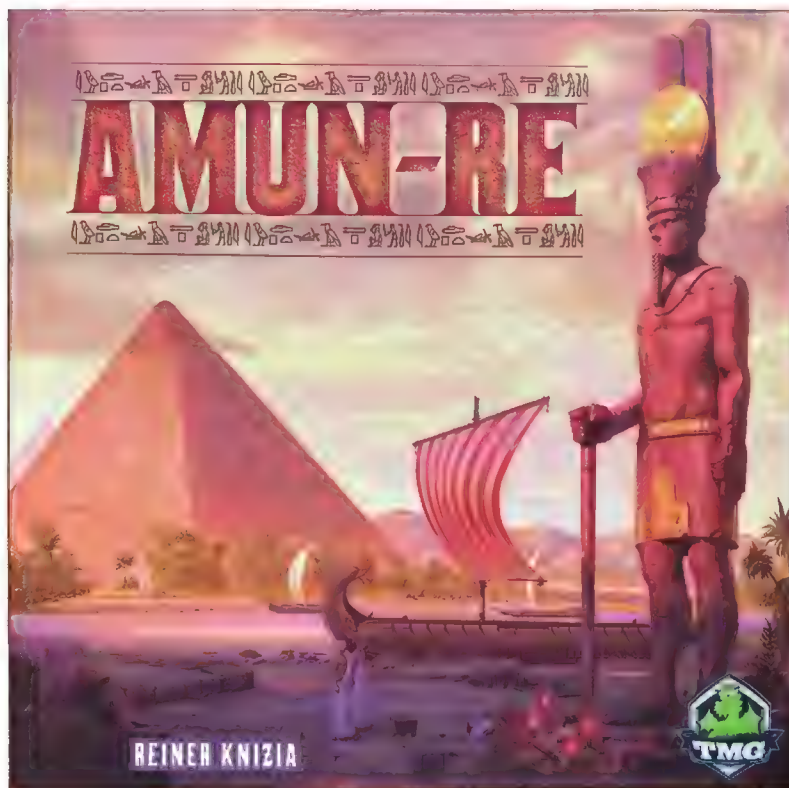


Figure 4.3: *Amun-Re* game box.





Figure 4.4: Game components for *Cleopatra and the Society of Architects*.

Among the more elaborate Egyptian-themed board games is *Cleopatra and the Society of Architects* (2006), in which players construct an impressive three-dimensional monument of cardboard and plastic parts. As with the other games, it involves competition, but the scenario is plausible. *Cleopatra* has offered a prize to the architect who can construct the most sumptuous palace. Like the other Egyptian building games, numerous trips to the quarry are necessary to pick up materials: door frames, obelisks, statues, columns, all of which are ready-made, kind of like an ancient Egyptian Home Depot. One unique aspect of the game is how it takes corruption for granted. Each player has a "Pyramid of Corruption." As players deal with various "tainted" characters, they acquire amulets of corruption that they must place inside their pyramid. At

the game's end, the player with the most amulets of corruption is fed to Sobek, the crocodile god. Once the most corrupt architect has been dispatched, the wealthiest architect remaining is declared the winner.

The games explored here are just a few of the more than one hundred Egyptian-themed games listed on BoardGameGeek, many focused on monument building. Varying widely in their approach, these games share a limited ability to represent the true grandeur of Egyptian architecture. Yet it is the grand monumentality of structures like the Great Pyramid of Giza—forty-four stories high, covering thirteen acres, built over a twenty-year period out of two million blocks averaging two tons each, enduring for millennia—that makes them such a popular subject of countless films, video games, and board games. While little plastic pyramids will never fully convey ancient Egypt's mania for building big, games like *Imhotep*, *Amun-Re*, and *Cleopatra and the Society of Architects* speak to the enduring popular mania for ancient Egyptian culture and history.

# ***Pillars of the Earth***

## **Building a Fantasy**

**Maile Hutterer**



Figure 4.5: Nine Men's Morris with dice,  
depicted in the fourteenth-century manuscript  
*Libro de los juegos*.

Figure 4.6: Game setup for *Pillars of the Earth*.



At some point in the history of Chester Cathedral, a game of Nine Men's Morris was etched into a pillar base in the cathedral's baptistery. The preserved board of this ancient two-player strategy game registers the diverse activities that took place in and around cathedral spaces. As fulcrums of medieval society, churches and their immediate environs bustled with human activity, both sacramental and quotidian. This casual intervention into Chester's architecture evokes the more prosaic experiences it housed—perhaps created to relieve the boredom of an unusually dry sermon. It is the confluence of monument and entertainment that reveals the cathedral's multifaceted embodiment. *Pillars of the Earth* (Kosmos, 2006) similarly combines architecture and gaming, allowing players to construct the fictitious cathedral of Kingsbridge over six rounds. And like the etching at Chester, *Pillars of the Earth* conjures the varied human interactions that envisioned, enlivened, and enacted the great churches of medieval Europe.

The popularity of Kosmos's game parallels the success of Ken Follett's novel, which garnered two sequels, a television series, and a video game. A 2007 pick for Oprah's Book Club, the original novel had wide appeal as a work that explores the human condition. Kingsbridge Cathedral manifests the good and the evil aspects at work in the community, including faith, ingenuity, pride, and ambition. The cathedral is more than a setting for the action; it becomes a character in itself—a complex and multidimensional entity that grows and changes over the course of the book.





Figure 4.7: Detail of cathedral in German edition of *Pillars of the Earth*.

Kosmos's *Pillars of the Earth* highlights the relationship between architecture and human activity that lies at the core of other works of historical fiction, from Victor Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* to Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*. One of the game's most compelling features is its dynamic relationship between different type of resources. While gold (monetary currency) allows players to hire workers and take various other actions, it is no more valuable than the other resources: sand, wood, stone, and metal. The importance of these raw materials for earning victory points evokes the medieval economy's dependence on the control of labor, exchange of goods, and, more importantly, immovable property rights, above the limited circulation of coinage.<sup>1</sup> Making strategic choices about how to invest in landed assets, whether to diversify among different resources or concentrate in a single raw material, would have been familiar to medieval lords, both secular and ecclesiastical alike.

*Pillars of the Earth* similarly highlights the variety of materials and skills required for building churches, which necessitated a large labor force with specialists in multiple trades. Major construction projects required the close collaboration of a master builder and a master carpenter. Timber was essential for erecting scaffolding, shoring, and centering, as well as the temporary structures used during construction itself.<sup>2</sup> Massive timbers also supported church roofs; estimates suggest that some one thousand oak trees made up the timber frame, or *charpente*, of Paris Cathedral.<sup>3</sup> Master carpenters were also responsible for designing and manufacturing lifting machines, building carts and barrows, and providing other indispensable construction instruments.

Metal was likewise critical to church construction. *Pillars of the Earth* highlights its importance in the manufacture of tools, stained glass, bells, and the

organ. These various uses of metal unfold sequentially, with the toolmaker introduced in round 1, the glassblower in round 4, and the bell maker and organ maker in round 6. The presence of a toolmaker from the start of the game evokes the diverse network of artisans needed to construct monumental architecture in a preindustrial age. Attentive players might note the interconnectedness

of masonry and stained glass. A church like Kingsbridge might require glass for over a hundred windows. For a project on this scale, the labor-intensive and time-consuming manufacture of glass required glaziers to begin their work in step with the start of construction.<sup>4</sup> Many great medieval churches also used metal structurally.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the most frequently cited example is the thirteenth-century cathedral of Amiens, which uses a giant metal chain almost like a belt (added around 1500). In *Pillars of the Earth*, the omniscient agency of the game's players replicates the close collaboration between artisans.

The decades-long construction periods typical for medieval church architecture

resulted in a succession of builders and patrons. Follett's book brings depth to the relationship between Prior Phillip and Tom Builder. Kosmos's version preserves these characters and others, which appear on craftsmen and event cards and are alluded to through locations on the game board. While each of these characters can affect a player's fortunes, none ultimately drives game progression. Instead, decisions and outcomes rest with the players, who occupy an indeterminant role. This mechanism is perhaps the most fantastical aspect of the game—in which a single force drives the network of individuals involved with such a construction project. By contrast, the wonder of medieval architecture, to my mind, lies in its expression of the diversity of human activity, both during and after construction. Indeed, I would suggest that the popularity of books like *Pillars of the Earth* rests to some degree on their ability to highlight human creativity and resourcefulness. As monumental, handcrafted works, buildings like Notre-Dame of Paris or Kingsbridge demonstrate the potential to achieve greatness—possibly even to realize dreams thought up during a monotonous sermon while playing a game with a friend.



Figure 4.8: Wooden roof framework of Notre-Dame of Paris.

# Adventures in Disney's Lands

## Theme Park-Themed Games

Trudi Sandmeier



Figure 4.9: Four game board backs for 1956 Disneyland land-themed games.



In July 1955, the Disneyland theme park opened its gates for the first time. Built on former orange groves in Anaheim, California, the park fulfilled Walt Disney's dream to provide an immersive environment of entertainment, storytelling, amusement, and fantasy to a rapidly expanding American middle class. While Disneyland was a new creation altogether, the park benefited from the success of Disney's thriving animation studio brand and served as a platform to promote Disney films and other media ventures.

Since the 1930s, the toy and game market provided lucrative opportunities for cross-promotion with the animated shorts and features produced by the Disney studios. Similarly, a year after Disneyland opened, longtime board game collaborator Parker Brothers released four new games, one for each of the park's original lands: Fantasyland, Adventureland, Frontierland, and Tomorrowland. The games featured self-contained experiences loosely tied to those of visiting Disneyland in person. All were simple spin-and-move games, designed to be easy for children to understand and play.

*Walt Disney's Fantasyland Game* aligned most closely with the realities of the park; it begins and ends at Sleeping Beauty's Castle and includes visits to five of the original rides. The board for *Walt Disney's Tomorrowland Rocket to the Moon Game* features renderings of several original landmarks, including the Clock of the World and the Moonliner, the vertical rocket that served as Tomorrowland's central icon. The other two games were more conceptual, featuring a ride on the Jungle Cruise in Adventureland and a cowboy-and-Indian adventure in Frontierland based on Disney's adaptations of the Davy Crockett folk legends.

In 1959, Transogram released *Walt Disney's Disneyland Game*. Also a spin-and-move game, the board featured visits to all four lands, where players were required to collect icons in order to win. The game begins (like a trip to Disneyland itself) with a trip up Main Street to the park's central hub, where players then choose which land to visit. Few park icons illustrated the game, although abstractions of Sleeping Beauty's Castle, King Arthur's Carousel, City Hall, and the Main Street Railroad Station appear. While undoubtedly firing the imaginations of children longing to visit the actual theme park, for those familiar with Disneyland, it must have seemed a pale reflection of the place.

Growing up in Southern California, I was fortunate to have parents who liked Disneyland. I celebrated almost every birthday at the park, first with family, and later with friends. I have vivid memories of those early trips and the feelings of wonder and magic that I felt. At some point after Walt Disney World opened in 1971, my parents purchased the Milton Bradley board game *A Visit to Walt Disney World (Magic Kingdom)*, and I began to explore this new version that was familiar yet different from my beloved park.

The larger and more elaborate Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida, was depicted in this larger and more elaborate board game introduced in 1972. When developing the actual theme parks, Disney designers known as Imagineers



Figure 4.10: Game board for Transogram's  
1959 Walt Disney's Disneyland Game.



relied on several signature moves to craft the visitors' experience. They used forced perspective to play with the scale of buildings, situated visual icons in each land to draw guests from place to place, and surrounded the entire park with an earthen berm that minimized real-world intrusions like power lines and outside buildings.<sup>1</sup> *A Visit to Walt Disney World* used many of the same tricks.

Before playing the game, players must first build the park. A three-dimensional backdrop is created by inserting the castle into a fireworks-embellished background, which then slips inside the box lid to serve as the borrowed scenery for the game board, creating a sense of place centered on the iconic castle. Cardboard walls are then assembled around the board to create a type of berm that also serves as a game element—monorail cards slide along the top of the berm, transporting players from one part of the game to another. The monorail

Figure 4.11: *A Visit to Walt Disney World's* assembled components, game board, and game box.







Figure 4.12: Looking through the Train Station archway, past the Haunted House, to the castle backdrop in *A Visit to Walt Disney World*.

berm also includes renderings of three of the parks' original hotels: the Contemporary, the Polynesian, and Fort Wilderness. Players complete the setup by assembling the Teacup Ride and the Haunted House, two park attractions and crucial gameplay elements.

Players travel to various parts of Disney World, in any order, visiting locations indicated on their destination cards. The game board includes recognizable features of the park itself, although their locations do not match up. Just as in real life, the Main Street Train Station serves as the starting point for the visit to the Magic Kingdom. The Haunted House is a three-dimensional cardboard dwelling with somewhat Italianate features, evocative of but not faithful to the actual Haunted Mansion. The Teacup Ride serves as an actual spinning ride for the game pieces. Although most visits to the real park end with a fireworks show, in this case, the game concludes when a player reaches the location of their final destination card, which can be anywhere on the board. The game requires you to build, strategize, and imagine, all while showcasing the various lands in the park.

Since Disneyland opened, more than thirty Disney theme park-themed games have appeared on the market. Some cover an entire park (such as the 1992 three-dimensional *Euro Disneyland*), while others focus on particular attractions (the 2020 *Disney Jungle Cruise Adventure Game*). Like the parks themselves, all are designed simultaneously to entertain and to evoke the real places that they represented. The parks transport visitors to idealized and imaginary places that exist both in real life and in the imagination. The games do the same thing one step removed, transporting players to the parks to replay actual trips or to imagine (and stoke desire for) ones not yet taken.

# Masterpiece

## Putting the Museum on Auction

Jeremy Braddock



Figure 4.13: Masterpiece game board.



Like Charles Darrow's original *Monopoly* board (1933), the track of the 1970 game *Masterpiece* is circular.<sup>1</sup> For both games, the rounded board is an apt figure for the revolving fortunes of capital thematized in the gameplay. *Monopoly* soon adopted its famous square board, which figured the real estate theme by evoking a city block. But the circular track remained a signal feature of *Masterpiece: The Art Auction Game*, where it dramatized the art market's recursive world of speculation and consecration and its mutually dependent spaces of the auction house and the museum.

At the center of the board is a reproduction of a portrait by Rembrandt. The original sold seven times in the twentieth century before it was bequeathed to the Art Institute of Chicago in 1922. Players of *Masterpiece* bid on the Rembrandt and twenty-three other paintings now owned by the Art Institute, which are arbitrarily assigned values ranging from \$100,000 to \$1,000,000. Two will be secretly classed as forgeries. The chosen canvases cultivate a familiarity and respect for canonical artists and works (Rembrandt, El Greco, Manet, Picasso, Grant Wood's *American Gothic*) and are spiced with a few outliers such as Peter Blume's *The Rock* (1948). The paintings are acquired at "bank auctions" and "private auctions"; profits from the latter are given to the player who has been forced to sell from their collection. When the final sale is made, players tally the value of their paintings together with cash on hand, and the richest person, as usual, wins.

*Masterpiece's* unspoken premise is that it wrests away the treasures of a great civic museum to disburse them to a range of whimsically unscrupulous collectors—prescribed personae that the game's players can pretend to adopt. This premise was dramatized both in the gameplay and in the game's supporting fictions, which were elaborated by an unprecedented coordination of packaging and promotion on the part of the game's producers, Parker Brothers.<sup>2</sup> In its endearingly campy TV commercial, the actors who portray the bidding collectors on the game's box are first shown energetically bidding on paintings in an ornate auction house; they are then seen around a table in the same auction house playing *Masterpiece*, where they conspicuously resemble poker players.<sup>3</sup> Though players are encouraged to participate in the auction fiction, the fact of the civic museum—as domain and final arbiter of cultural value—is never far from the actual gameplay. The game's reproduced paintings are unmistakably the size of souvenir postcards on offer in the Art Institute's gift shop.

Parker Brothers released *Masterpiece* in the same year Alec Wildenstein (scion and vice president of New York's Wildenstein & Company) bought Velázquez's *Juan de Pareja* (1650) at Christie's in London for £2.31 million (or \$5.54 million).<sup>4</sup> It was the first million-pound painting, almost tripling the previous record. Accordingly, one of the Art Institute's two Velázquezes, *Saint John the Baptist*, is among the works on offer in *Masterpiece*. The following year, it was revealed that Wildenstein had in fact been covertly acting on behalf of the Met,

which put its record-setting Velázquez—a portrait of the artist’s enslaved assistant—on exhibit in May 1971.<sup>5</sup> In 1997 the Wildensteins were discovered to be in possession of eight illuminated manuscripts looted by the Nazis from the Jewish collector Alphonse Kann.<sup>6</sup> This, like *Juan de Pareja’s* eventual arrival at the Met, seems to be anticipated by *Masterpiece’s* supporting materials. The short bio of the game’s avatar collector Francoise du Bonnet reads:

Count Francois du Bonnet. One of the most popular figures on the continent. Crafty, cunning, charming beyond belief. During the Nazi occupation, the Count worked with French groups posing as an enemy collaborator when the Louvre was sacked. Still some question as to whether the Germans stole genuines or forgeries. Made headlines in 1951 when he purchased an unknown original Rembrandt for 34 francs.

*Masterpiece* was designed by Marvin Glass and Associates, the firm that had authored gaming successes such as *Mouse Trap*, *Operation*, and *Toss Across*. Many had thought the era of the board game was over (the company’s other big 1970 release had been the Nerf ball), but *Masterpiece* became the biggest Parker Brothers success since *Monopoly*, selling 3.5 million copies by the end of 1972. In 1976, *Masterpiece’s* second edition coincided with the first great blockbuster exhibition, *Treasures of Tutankhamun*, which visited Chicago and five other US cities and inaugurated a bonanza for civic museums that would extend through the end of the century.<sup>7</sup> That same year, a man named Christian Thee was awarded \$400,000 in a lawsuit brought against Parker Brothers and Marvin Glass and Associates (\$400,000 is the median value of one of *Masterpiece’s* paintings). Thee had designed an art auction game called *Artifax*, which he had submitted for consideration to Parker Brothers; Parker Brothers had then surreptitiously passed the idea on to Marvin Glass, who developed it as *Masterpiece: The Art Auction Game*.<sup>8</sup> *Masterpiece* is a forgery.



Figure 4.14: Alec Wildenstein and Louis Goldberg stand beside Diego Velázquez’s portrait of his enslaved assistant Juan de Pareja at Christie’s in London in 1970.

Figure 4.15: Profile card for Count Francois du Bonnet, “one of six colorful characters who might attend such an auction” as the one staged by *Masterpiece*.



### COUNT FRANCOIS DU BONNET

One of the most popular figures on the continent. Crafty, cunning, charming beyond belief. During the Nazi occupation, the Count worked with French groups posing as an enemy collaborator when the Louvre was sacked. Still some question as to whether the Germans stole genuines or forgeries. Made headlines in 1951 when he purchased an unknown original Rembrandt for 34 francs.

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# Consuming Place



# Playing and Visiting the 1939 New York World's Fair

Amy F. Ogata



Figure 5.1: Box, game board, and components for the 1939 game *Bobby and Betty's Trip to the New York World's Fair*.



Games produced for the 1939–1940 New York World’s Fair ask the player to “visit” the fair on the tabletop. These objects, simultaneously souvenir and amusement, reinforced the complex spatial politics of the fair itself. Combining chance and speed with contemplation of the wondrous fabricated world of the fairgrounds amid the economic uncertainty of the Great Depression, board games paralleled efforts of civic leaders and advertisers to promise better times ahead. In this context, the planned environment of the fair flourished as a form of persuasive popular entertainment. The 1939 exhibition in New York promised a vision of the world improved by science and technology. The board game made this a consumable lesson that could be endlessly replayed.

The New York World’s Fair of 1939 commemorated the 150th anniversary of the inauguration of George Washington as a means of viewing the “World of Tomorrow.” The New York World’s Fair Corporation, an entity of the business and political leaders who planned the fair, contracted with corporations and designers to build official and private pavilions on a former ash dump in Queens. The aims of economic uplift, education, and commercial diversion intersected on the fairgrounds.

Urban planning, then, was a motif of the “World of Tomorrow.” The fair comprised seven zones, radiating from the glowing white Trylon and Perisphere, an elongated pyramid and sphere that became the fair’s logo and geographic center. Modernistic shapes characterized the fair’s individual pavilions, and a carefully designed color scheme—increasingly saturated away from the center—harmonized the visual impression. The theme of cohesive planning encompassed the temporary grounds and ideal schemes envisioning the future. The Perisphere contained Henry Dreyfuss’s “Democracity,” a plan for a greenbelt city that visitors experienced as if the panorama below was a sprawling board game.

The New York World’s Fair resulted in a cascade of officially licensed merchandise. In Parker Brothers’ *Bobby and Betty’s Trip to the New York World’s Fair* (1939), one visited the fair by landing on specific sites. The game used surrogate children to guide the players; the four turned-wood forms, painted in bright colors, were proxies for Bobby and Betty. The players not only toured the exhibition in this reduced tabletop format but imagined themselves as the fictional characters depicted on the box.

Bobby and Betty were the invention of the New York World’s Fair Corporation’s public relations and advertising wing. The game was tied to an illustrated children’s book of the same title, coauthored by the fair’s commissioner and chief salesman, Grover A. Whalen. Whalen narrated the wonders of the fair using photographs of models and a map of the grounds. The same map constituted the play surface of the board game. Each player drew five printed cards, which named a site and a number corresponding to “destination points” on the board. The player determined the path of the visit, arranging stops efficiently, since exiting the fairgrounds at the Corona Gate was the objective. Twenty-six



Figure 5.2: Box, game board, and components for *Going to the World's Fair Game* (1939).

cards indicate main attractions. Cards also direct players to New York City and State buildings, Government and Transportation zones, the Amusement zone, and the bridges, the Long Island Railroad, and two New York City subway lines. Emphasizing both the official pavilions and transportation to the fair, the game incorporated travel to the former wasteland via new infrastructure. Civic transportation was bound to the smaller-scale planning of the man-made lakes, temporary pavilions, and zones, making the player a canny participant in the broad dynamics of urban planning.

Players of Milton Bradley's *Going to the World's Fair Game* moved by chance across the rainbow-colored track that directed the play across two sides of a folding board. They landed on concessions in the Children's World exhibits, such as the Trip Around the World, the House of Magic, Instant Photo Machine, and Infant Incubators. Amusement Zone attractions like the Parachute Jump, roller coaster, and shooting gallery were also on the journey, alongside stops for ice cream, peanuts, and soft drinks. The road led to squares describing official pavilions, where the player could win prizes such as modeling clay, model airplanes, and dolls.

*Going to the World's Fair* stressed a consumer's experience. Money motivated the player to move through the space, and two dice determined the spaces moved, rendering the exposition's tradition of viewing into an opportunity for purchasing entertainment. *Going to the World's Fair* promised rides, prizes, popular attractions, and tin coins to its juvenile players. The explicitly commercial theme of the game dovetailed with the fair itself. The Children's World and rides were part of the Amusement Zone of the fair, situated around a lake and designed to appeal to curiosity and thrills at a cheap price. The exotic villages, themed food, and entertainments in the Amusement Zone were spatially isolated from the other parts of fair. This game not only emphasized these commercial transactions as play but also rendered the fair experience as a scenic tour of pleasures and prizes.

If visiting the fair by landing on a mark was the dominant genre of board games, then these games shared with other commercial souvenir products an investment in the spatial relationships of the structures and in the engagement of the player with the wonder of the fair site ex nihilo. The implication was not merely to know the fair by seeing it from above, but to re-create it again at home. The images of stability and hope that fair designers stressed were built on an underlying notion that the fair and the board game shared, that the world of tomorrow was within the grasp of the human hand.

The board games produced for the 1939–1940 New York World's Fair were not innocuous lessons. Experiencing the designed environment in play created an opportunity to practice urban planning in miniature. Envisioning and visiting the "world of tomorrow" as a board game modeled a larger preoccupation with design to reassure in times of turmoil.



# Hanging Out at the Food Court with *Electronic Mall Madness*

Chad Randl



Figure 5.3: Garden Court at Southdale Shopping Center, Edina, Minnesota.

Southdale Center in suburban Minneapolis–Saint Paul was the first large-scale enclosed shopping mall in the United States. Designed by Victor Gruen in 1956, it featured over seventy shops on three levels surrounding an enormous Garden Court. Situated in a sea of parking lots and suburban development, Southdale served as a primary retail model for the postwar era. When Milton Bradley released *Electronic Mall Madness* in 1989, regional malls like Southdale were a fixture of the American commercial landscape and of American youth culture.<sup>1</sup> Appearing over subsequent decades, new editions of the game confirmed the ongoing cultural and marketing potency of its theme.<sup>2</sup>

To play the 1989 and 2004 versions of *Mall Madness* required first assembling the molded-plastic walls that make up the mall's two levels and the cardboard pathways, entrances, windows, and signs for the twenty-two stores and amenities. In the game, a battery-powered console takes the place of Gruen's Garden Court. Outfitted with a speaker and control buttons (the main one on top resembles a glass-roofed dome), and slots for an ATM and a cash register, the console is the center of both mall and game. Banks of escalators on the console's sides allow passage between the mall levels while furthering the thematic place setting. Players begin at the mall entrance with a debit card and individual shopping list. On their turn, each player activates a "game voice" on the console that announces sales at the mall's different stores as well as how far the player's shopper can move that turn. Shoppers are hindered by announcements telling

Figure 5.4: Game board and central console for *Electronic Mall Madness*.



them to “go to the restrooms” or by an alarm signaled after the failure to remove a security tag; they are helped by food tokens acquired at the food court that can be traded for additional movement points. The first shopper to amass six purchases wins.

*Mall Madness* is part of a genre of shopping-themed board games that date back well over a century. The Philadelphia retailer Strawbridge and Clothier released its promotional *Game of Shopping* in 1879, with a circular track divided into departments and cashier and elevator spaces; Parker Brothers published a different game under the same title a decade later. Like earlier versions, titles from the post-World War II era, such as the *Game of Shopping at the Supermarket* (1955) and the *Check Out Game: 4 Square Food Market Shopping* (1959), were both celebrating and normalizing new rituals and typologies of consumption from the supermarket to the shopping center.

Memorialized in 1980s films like *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982) and *Valley Girl* (1983), the mall was an otherworldly environment where teens dated, worked part-time, and passed hours together, whether they had money to spend or not.<sup>3</sup> In a way, they were enacting Gruen’s original vision of the mall as a place of community gathering and socialization, not just consumption. The standard open court and upper-level galleries and escalators were essential to the mall’s social and performative character, adapted from the atria and grand stairways found in nineteenth-century department stores. *Mall Madness* replicates this interaction (and introduces a random movement element) when the electronic voice tells a player to “meet a friend at the movie theater” or “send a friend for ice cream.”

Constructing the mall from the various components, moving the shoppers from food court to arcade to sunglasses store, reinforced a familiarity with the setting that most players likely already felt in the late 1980s. And the game’s popularity must be partially attributable to its success in encapsulating the typology. Within the next decade, however, the enclosed mall began a slow but steady decline. The vibrant shops that populate the game’s fictional (and zero-vacancy) mall strike a dissonant note today, when most malls are either dead, dying, or being redeveloped for new uses.<sup>4</sup>



Figure 5.5: Detail of Strawbridge and Clothier’s 1879 *Game of Shopping* game board.



I recently picked up a 2004 copy of *Electronic Mall Madness* and convinced my eighteen-year-old daughter to try it out. We selected our characters and set out, guided by the electronic console. Since Laney and her older sisters grew past adolescence, I've had a hard time getting them to play board games with me. I should have found *Mall Madness* sooner. After completing her shopping list (and thus winning the game), Laney offered to play again. I asked why she liked it, and she said that when she was younger, she never had her own debit card and money to buy anything, let alone a list of things. This is surely another reason for the popularity of *Mall Madness* and games like it: the dopamine hit of the shopping spree without the real-life consequences of a diminished bank account and buyer's remorse. Every outfit fit, nothing needed to be returned, and every purchase was a step toward victory. Like the mall in which the game is situated, and indeed like most games, our experience was sealed off from the outside world, time briefly stood still, and all dreams of prosperity and plenty were fulfilled.

# Boxing Up the Escape Room Experience

Marco Arnaudo



Figure 5.6: ThinkFun's 2020 game *Escape the Room: The Cursed Dollhouse*.

The massive success of brick-and-mortar escape rooms in recent years is something of a mystery. Their appearance in films, video games, and television shows like *Modern Family*, *Portlandia*, and *Schitt's Creek* confirms an ongoing cultural interest. Originating in Asia before spreading worldwide, this combination of live-action role-playing game with puzzling allows participants to work together in a room that has been locked from the outside. Solving a series of enigmas within a predetermined time frame reveals a way to get out; otherwise players "lose" and are released unceremoniously. The mystery lies in the fact that although puzzling is a very old activity, it has always also had a rather niche following. Simply adding a locked door and situating participants in a fictional situation has turned puzzling into a mainstream form of entertainment.

It didn't take long for the tabletop game industry to capitalize on the popularity of this new trend. The "escape room in a box" genre, with a series of interlinked puzzles framed by a fictional situation, emerged and has grown to about seventy titles to date. In many cases, their settings reproduce the kind of exotic locales found in brick-and-mortar escape rooms, like an old mansion or a catacomb. The fictional format, leaving it to the players to imagine the space they occupy, opens the possibility for especially unconventional settings—like the version in which players are told they are trapped inside a video game, or transformed into dolls and imprisoned in a dollhouse. It also allows games to depict scary topics that physical establishments may hesitate to offer. Players may be trapped in a circus and pursued by a killer clown, or they may be lost in a valley, surrounded by angry dinosaurs—scenarios that would require theme park-level resources to pull off in real life. Role-playing elements also become prominent in the board game escape rooms, especially when the setting comes from well-known storyworlds, like that of *Alice in Wonderland*, the Sherlock Holmes universe, or in *Unlock! Star Wars*.

Like their physical counterparts, each game can be fully enjoyed only once, because the puzzles lose luster once they have been solved. However, a person who owns the game could then gift, sell, or trade the game or host several game nights for different friends—all advantages that in-person escape rooms lack. The initial cost is much lower than that of a visit to an actual escape room, especially with a high number of participants (since escape rooms tend to price per person).

Boxed escape rooms first appeared in 2016, with the release of three successful systems: *Escape the Room*, *Escape Room: The Game*, and *Exit: The Game*. *Escape the Room* games (including *Mystery at the Stargazer's Manor*, *Secret of Dr. Gravely's Retreat*, and *The Cursed Dollhouse*) come with a series of sealed envelopes to be opened in a specific order; only by solving the puzzle contained in one envelope are the players allowed to open the next. Challenges include logical puzzles, visual puzzles, and manual puzzles.





Figure 5.7: Still frame from a 2020 episode of *Schitt's Creek* showing characters visiting an escape room.

*Exit: The Game* shares traits with the *Escape the Room* system, but in a more spartan format. *Exit* games consist mainly of a deck of cards, a decoder wheel, a booklet explaining the story, and variable components depending on the setting. A peculiarity of the system is that some of the components must be folded, cut, torn apart, or written on, making each copy of the game playable only once. The low price of *Exit* games (under \$20 each) seems to make up for their perishable nature, as the system now includes more than thirty distinct titles.

The *Escape Room: The Game* system showcases a more elaborate production, including sets of plastic keys and a device called the "chrono decoder." Solving the games' puzzles reveals which keys must be inserted in the decoder. Distinct from other escape rooms in a box, this system relies heavily on large maps that help establish a sense of their fictional locations. The success of this formula is confirmed by the fact that as of late 2022, fourteen editions and dozens of different scenarios have been produced (including one based on the *Jumanji* franchise).

Another innovation to the genre appeared in 2017: the highly successful *Unlock!* system, which includes over forty adventures. Each *Unlock!* game relies on numbered cards as physical equipment. The game is played in conjunction with a companion app. The solution to every riddle is a number that must be entered into the app or that corresponds to one of the unused cards. Numbers written on different cards can be combined to represent the interaction of different

objects. The advantage of the app is that it can provide clues of different nature (images, video clips, sounds).

More recent systems include *Deckscape* (eight games since 2017) and *Escape Room in a Box* (two games since 2016), which overlap in approach with the *Exit* series games. Rounding out the genre are one-shot games like *MacGyver: The Escape Room Game* (2018) and *Mystery House* (2019), which comes with a 3D cardboard house, and players must peek inside to find the clues. Since 2018, the *Escape Tales* system (four games to date) has also represented the beginning of a next generation in the genre, relying on familiar elements such as the companion app from *Unlock!*, but adding an unprecedented commitment to telling a complex story through the provided puzzles.

Escape rooms have become an established entertainment form. Escape rooms in a box extend this pastime and make it even more accessible. The ordinary space of the game table—in a living room, a kitchen island, a library's community room—becomes an extraordinary one. Players become adventurers, explores, spies, all empowered to extricate themselves from the stickiest of situations. With the disruptions that accompanied the COVID-19 pandemic still affecting global economies and local real estate markets, the popularity of this genre of board games may even outlast its architectural, brick-and-mortar origins.

# Trump and Racialized Capitalism

Whitten Overby

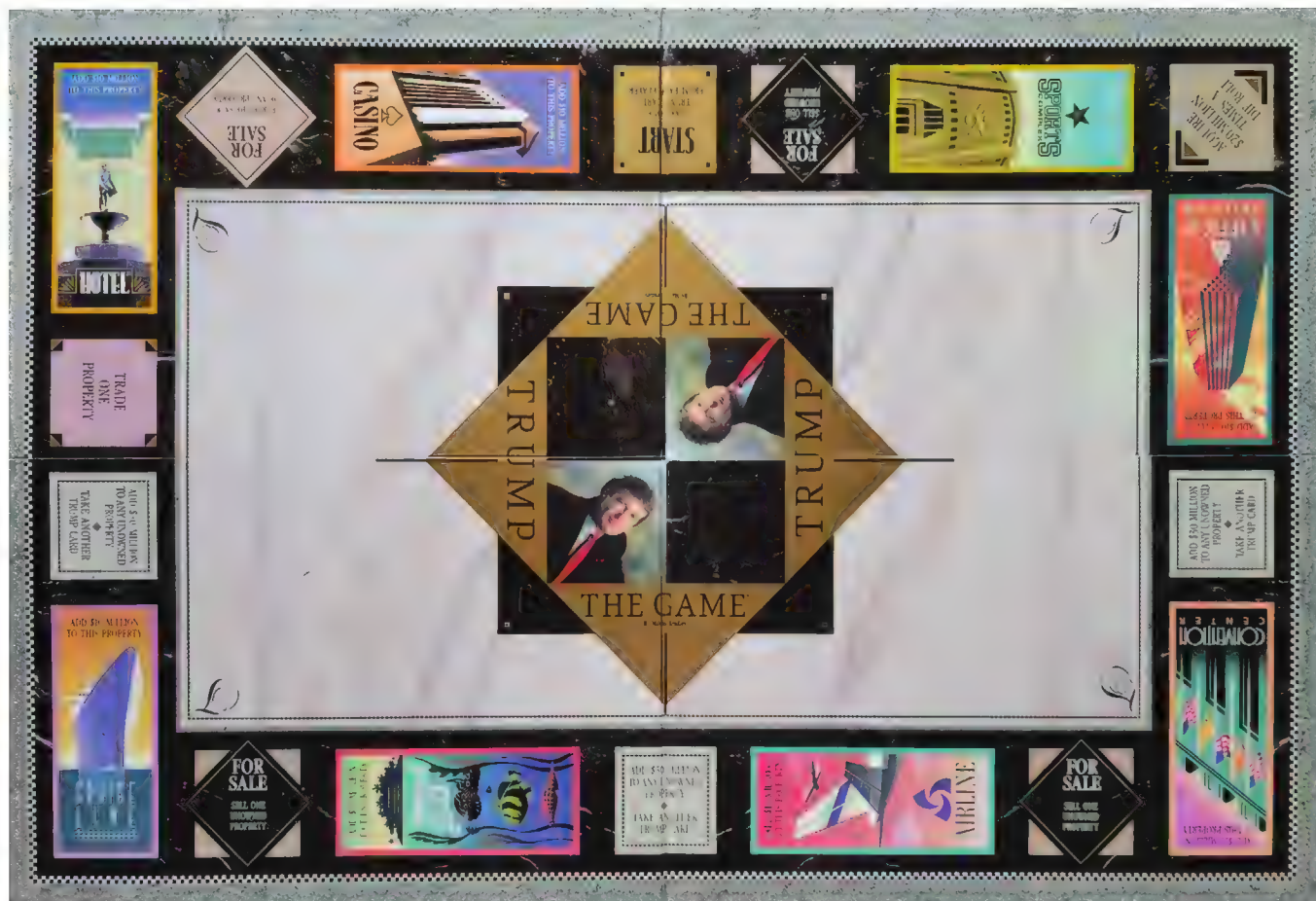


Figure 5.8: Game board for *Trump: The Game*.



Milton Bradley released *Trump: The Game* in 1989. Soon after, Donald J. Trump took out full-page advertising spreads in New York newspapers, declaring that the state should reinstate the death penalty for five Black and brown teenage boys falsely convicted of raping an affluent white female jogger in Central Park. Throughout his career, the man who became the forty-fifth president considered bodies of color an intrusive and sullyng presence amid the elite, white, privatized spaces that made up his world and much of his real estate portfolio. By preying on such bodies and perpetuating white grievance politics, he created a coalition of followers who provided the basis of his fame, fortune, and political support.

*Trump: The Game* evokes the exclusive investment culture that dominated 1980s Manhattan. The game's victory conditions are shared by its titular star: once all the available property on the board has been purchased, the player with the most money wins. Both in Trump's business empire and in the game, short-term capital acquisition is favored over long-term investment. Around the game table, wealth and fame accrue to those who take in as much as possible, as fast as possible. Though a celebration of success and business acumen, the game itself did not sell well and so joined the ranks of other Trump-branded ventures—Atlantic City casinos, commuter airline, for-profit college, steaks.

The exclusive spaces bought, sold, and exchanged in the game are suitably represented on the game board in Trump's favorite black marble and gold hues. Destinations include cruise lines and casinos—privatized zones that limit access (as patrons) by the proletarian bodies of color whom Trump villainized. Prices and properties in circulation in the game demonstrate a brash detachment from middle- and lower-class economic realities. The game's rule book declares, "Live the fantasy! Feel the power! Make the deals!" Fantasy dominates New York City

Figure 5.9: Collage of newspaper clippings assembled from stills in Sarah Burns's 2012 documentary film *The Central Park Five*.



politics in much the same way as it underpins the game. In a 1991 essay on the Central Park Five, Joan Didion claims that the city's elite relied on a mythology of sentimentality.<sup>1</sup> Benevolence cloaks white supremacist desires to hold on to power, police supposedly violent citizens of color (embodied by the Central Park Five), and prevent such citizens from mingling with the bourgeoisie. Trump perpetuated this myth from the beginning of his real estate career. In 1973, the United States Department of Justice filed a lawsuit against Donald and his father Fred for segregating their working-class Queens housing projects, the basis of the family fortune.<sup>2</sup> Though the family settled out of court (and denied any wrongdoing), the case revealed how the Trumps profited from white socioeconomic mobility while denying similar experiences to Black and brown tenants.

Among the innumerable myths that frame the Trump family's public identity is one involving Donald, his daughter Ivanka, and a set of Legos. Ivanka claimed she assembled Legos on her fifth Christmas to resemble Trump Tower. Donald later asserted that he built the Lego model. A journalist concluded that no one had built a Lego replica of the signature building.<sup>3</sup> The story instead hovers in an ether of manufactured legends meant to render the family more creative than they are—but every bit as self-promoting. Such anecdotes constitute pieces of a metaphorical game with a shifting set of ideological rules meant to exploitatively generate and wield power. The board game presents the fantasy of wealth and power as being within the reach of anyone who wants to play. But if players really want to win beyond the game board, they will ignore the rules and leverage myth, publicity, and divisive politics as does the game's namesake.

As a cultural artifact that furthers mythos and fantasy, *Trump: The Game* insists on noble intentions that mask exploitative and financially unsound real estate investments. The rule book declares a universal desire to inhabit the world of spatial opulence set forth by well-advertised businessmen with money to squander. *Trump: The Game* and the Central Park Five advertisements express the politics of a waning demographic that wants to retain spatial power. Ironically, the board game employs the same color palette as the Black painter Jean-Michel Basquiat, who used black and gold to promote a sense of 1980s Black royalty ascendant in underground New York. Basquiat's painting (*Defacement*) *The Death of Michael Stewart* connects explicitly to the city's contemporaneous politics and white police brutality perpetrated against an innocent Black man. Basquiat, whose paintings now sell for among the highest prices in the art market, critically represents an antiracist morality in opposition to the values embodied by Trump. Meanwhile, the former president, now based at Mar-a-Lago, promotes voter suppression to advance his brand of racialized capitalism. Donald's beloved market has yet to determine a victor.



Figure 5.10: Money from *Trump: The Game*.







# Conquest and Control



# The National Mind as a Prison

## *Fortress America*

Jonathan M. Bullinger and Aaron Trammell



Figure 6.1: The original *Fortress America* box art, depicting San Francisco; New York City; Mount Rushmore, South Dakota; and Monument Valley, Arizona, as battlefronts.



Mid-1980s popular media in the United States was suffused with a nationalist fervor from the popular and uncritical reception of Springsteen's "Born in the USA" to movies like *Red Dawn* to board games such as *Fortress America* (1986). Michael Gray's *Fortress America* offers insights into how hobbyists negotiated the ideological conflict that was playing out on the global stage; the game resonated with an anxious and isolated hobby gamer who bought into President Reagan's hawkish messaging about the precarity of democracy, the evils of communism, and the importance of free trade alliances.

*Fortress America* is a master class in American propaganda and a paradigm in understanding the subjectivity of the late Cold War gamer. The game's title is associated with the conservative belief that the United States was primarily isolationist before World War II. It also alludes to a tangentially related conservative strategy of defense for both the United States and Canada in the event that all other allies were defeated. Even if players are unaware of this history, the term "fortress" alone guides them toward a specific geopolitical stance for the United States. The game, then, draws on a long lineage of US isolationistic tendencies and a culture of fear furthered by President Reagan's jingoistic foreign policy.

*Fortress America's* game board emphasizes distinct borders. Thick black lines demarcate regions ("West," "Rocky Mountains," "Plains," "South," and "East"), and thin black lines identify state boundaries—reimagining America as strategic territory to be conquered by hostile communist invaders. The result is a combination of real political boundaries (state lines) and imaginary, mythical ones ("Above the fruited plain!"). Maps are "subjective, interpretative, and fictional constructs of facts" that both deterritorialize and reterritorialize.<sup>1</sup> They attempt to

Figure 6.2: The game board map and miniature pieces packaged in *Fortress America*.





Figure 6.3: A high school history teacher is shot while attempting to parley with invading Soviet troops in the 1984 film *Red Dawn*.

selectively represent spatial knowledge through scale, framing, and coding; as such, “mapping may be regarded as a distinct epistemology.”<sup>2</sup> *Fortress America*’s map centers America in the players’ imagination, positions Canada as weak and impotent, and abstracts the rest of the world as three opposing blocs: the “Euro-Socialist Pact,” “Central American Federation,” and “Asian People’s Alliance.” Succinctly put, commies on every side.

According to the period’s political rhetoric, Reagan was the optimistic statesman (“an attractive blend of naivety and wisdom”),<sup>3</sup> eager to sell the world on American righteousness, not an isolationist seeking to retreat into the safety of a stronghold.<sup>4</sup> Yet the “Fortress America” ontology is one of fear and besiegement—dark themes highlighted by media representations of the arms race and communism during the late Cold War.

The feature films *Red Dawn* (1984) and *Invasion U.S.A.* (1985), like *Fortress America* and many other war-themed games, construct a hostile and masculine space for the United States based on a traditional ground war—an anachronistic conceit at the time, as fears of nuclear holocaust loomed large in the popular imagination. Perhaps these fears were assuaged through control over a finite, knowable, tangible, physical space in miniature. *Fortress America* is one last nostalgic vision of a preglobal economy that revolved around the values of the nation-state: a time before the slippery slope of networked, informational, increasingly privatized wars defined more by mediated space and programmed violence in the post-Cold War era.<sup>5</sup>

Fans of the game read it as fiction that resonates decades later. Writing in 2006, one fan imagines the game as an outgrowth of contemporary imperialist policies: “Fortress America posits a near future in which George W. Bush has alienated the world to such a degree that EVERYONE decides to revolt and

invade the United States.”<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the isolationist vision of America evoked by the game is mirrored by the demographic and geographic position of the hobbyists who played it. Just as the United States is itself isolated, surrounded by the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and the Gulf of Mexico, so many fans equate the nation’s spatial situation with a personal desire for isolation.<sup>7</sup> Fear-driven isolationism manifests itself today in the form of gated communities, white militias occupying state capitals, issues of homeland security, and immigration protests.

Unlike other analog game simulations, wargaming and the real war it represents have a unique relationship regarding space and place. If we see the game board as a map, and *Fortress America* as a representation of the United States, then we can understand that “mapping becomes the two-dimensional ‘staging’ of actuality or desire.”<sup>8</sup> The analog game battlefield is all about the role of the game itself within a white male suburban imaginary. *Fortress America* helped these players to navigate their fears of the unthinkable while also reinforcing a jingoistic and nationalistic mindset that continues to resonate in our political and social lives today.



# Imperial Board Games for Future Colonists

Diana Garvin



Figure 6.4: Game board for *La conquista dell'Abissinia* (The Conquest of Abyssinia), printed in 1936 by the Farina Lattea Erba Cereal Company in Bergamo, Italy.

The Italian public's enthusiasm for dictator Benito Mussolini and the Fascist Party peaked in the mid-1930s with the military occupation of Ethiopia. Troops for the *milizia volontaria* invaded the sovereign nation in October 1935 to establish Italian East Africa, an area that comprises modern-day Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia. The occupation was hugely expensive, both due to its direct cost and in losses from trade sanctions by the League of Nations, to which both Italy and Ethiopia belonged. To balance the budget, all Italians were called to participate in the regime's colonial ventures. Men enlisted in the armed services. Women donated their gold wedding rings on the Giornata della Fede (Day of Faith, also literally translated as the Day of the Wedding Rings). Children vicariously participated in the Fascist regime's imperial project as they threw a pair of dice across the boards of games like *La conquista dell'Abissinia* (*The Conquest of Abyssinia*), *Alla conquista economica dell'impero* (*Economic Conquest of Empire*), and *Tombola storica geografica di Etiopia* (*Historical Geographic Bingo of Ethiopia*).

Italian conquest games of the Fascist era operate in the category of racing board games, wherein two or more players select chips to represent themselves and then throw a pair of dice to proceed across a board mined with obstacles (lose a turn) and larded with rewards (skip ahead two spaces). In *La conquista dell'Abissinia*, Italian children could choose to represent themselves on the board by selecting between chips depicting Italian military units and machines. Players could be the aviation forces. They could also be an airplane. These chips mattered because they signified how much power different players possessed in the context of Italian empire, and what they possessed in the colonial world. Train, ship, and plane chips allowed people to become machines. Military technology appeared to sanitize warfare, by distancing shooters from their human targets. Rules dictated that these chips moved through the game with fewer casualties. Conquest games rewarded the fastest movement through Abyssinia. Specifically, they blasted through decades of military history and thousands of kilometers of the Italian march across the Horn of Africa. The first square typically depicts the purchase of the Bay of Assab in Eritrea in 1870. The final square concludes with the conquest of Addis Ababa in Ethiopia in 1935.

Conquest games took liberties with military history, domesticating atrocities. In *La conquista dell'Abissinia*, the Italian Fascist Red Cross bombings in Ethiopia constituted the last major play to determine who could win the game. In the traditional Game of the Goose, square 51 is known as The Prison. Visually, this section of the board game calls attention to itself by involving the only half-move (*-bis*) of the game. As in the earlier game, landing on square 51 suggests that the player is wounded. Wounded players are placed in a special holding area, a Red Cross camp at square 51.5, where they must wait, losing all turns, until another Italian player arrives.

Landing on Dessiè, square 38, means that all players must stay in place except for Aviation, who flies ahead to square 42. In December 1935, the Italian forces

dropped forty incendiary bombs on a Seventh-Day Adventist mission compound, including one on its adjoining hospital. The Red Cross on the hospital's roof became a landing target. According to the Fascist narrative, the bombings were retaliation for Ethiopian brutalization of captured Italian soldiers. An Ethiopian man, perhaps Haile Selassie, hoists a black umbrella marked with the red cross. This image sits next to square 57, Ras Desta, which stalls the player for two rolls of the dice. Ras Desta proposed placing empty Red Cross tents at a distance from the real Red Cross center where the doctors actually worked. When Italians recognized this practice, they bombed without distinction.

At this point in the game, and only at this point, the outcome hangs in the balance. If you land on square 45, you must return to Asmara to restart the colonial enterprise. In the old Game of the Goose, square 45 is the Death hazard; here it is marked by a Red Cross camp. Similarly, the Red Cross in square 63 sends players back three spaces, to the Neghelli highlands near the Wadara forest, where Ras Desta's troops rallied. In other words, landing on or near the Red Cross always stalls forward progress in the Italian colonial game.

The game traces military history, but it does not move at a regular pace. Dice rolls introduce huge variance. Hazard squares send people whizzing forward or back or halt their progress altogether. In other words, *The Conquest of Abyssinia* functions as memory does. It highlights significant generals and their battles even as it steadily progresses through the day-to-day. Playing *The Conquest of Abyssinia* regularized chaotic military action and normalized war.

Game makers commissioned by food companies had financial stakes in the commercial success of these games. At the same time that Italian children played games of imperial conquest in Italy, private food companies established their retail presence in the Horn of Africa. Farina Lattea Erba, a cereal company, and Compagna Italiana Liebig, a yeast maker, produced and distributed games like *La conquista dell'Abissina* and *Alla conquista economica dell'impero* in exchange for box tops. Bingo games, like *Tombola storica geografica di Etiopia*, emphasized the act of collection through play. To win, children needed to assemble the right mix of Italian train stations, indigenous *tucul* huts, and electric stations to light the way. These imperial games taught future colonists not only how to conquer the Horn of Africa but also how to maintain power through the development and control of local infrastructure. In Fascist Italy, playtime meant learning how to move through colonial spaces, how to manage colonial goods, and how to interact with colonial people.



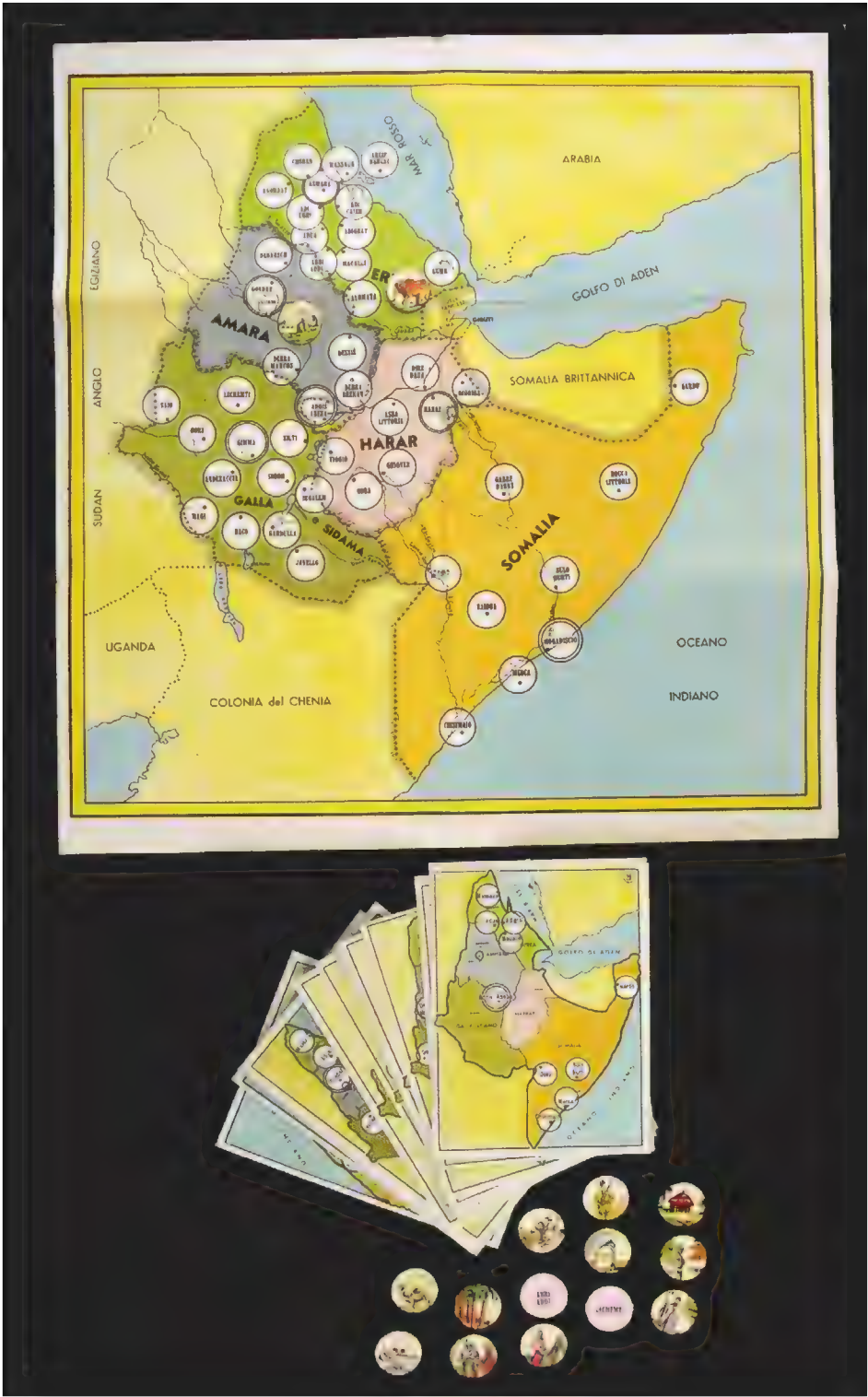
Figure 6.5: Game board detail of *La conquista dell'Abissinia* showing the Red Cross camp.

Figure 6.6: Game box for *Tombola storica geografica di Etiopia* (Historical Geographic Bingo of Ethiopia), created in 1937 by Nonno Ebe and published by Carroccio in Milan.





Figure 6.7: Maps and collectible playing pieces for *Tombola storica geografica di Etiopia*.



# Risk Analysis

## Mapping Conquest on the Game Board

Andrew Shanken



Figure 6.8: Game board for the 1959  
Parker Brothers edition of *Risk*.

*La conquête du monde*, renamed and redesigned as *Risk* for the American market, first appeared in France in 1957. It is a Cold War game hiding behind the thin veil of historical warfare. It cycles back to an ambiguous past, with cannons and cavalry, distant enough from the geopolitics of the postwar period to provide cover. Unlike its historically rooted cousin, Allan B. Calhamer's *Diplomacy*, which begins in 1901 on a map of 1914 Europe, *Risk* avoids chronology. But the Cold War sneaks in nonetheless. The original French box cover, in alarming red, shows two intersecting hot red circles—the Western and Eastern Hemispheres—demarcating the two distinct theaters of World War II. By 1957, nuclear weapons and intercontinental ballistic missiles had rendered such a division defunct. One senses in the map, especially in the golden laurel superimposed over the two circles, a kind of nostalgia for the geographically bound wars of old.

The original French game map comes straight out of grammar school geographies, with its strong solid colors—pink, purple, red, green, orange, and tan—separating the continents. Nothing is to scale, nor should we expect it to be. Africa is grossly undersized, a tad larger than Europe, and Latin America is puny. Perhaps the primary lesson of the board is the obfuscation of national identity. A number of countries are labeled ambiguously within larger swatches of color. These geopolitical regions are given meaning by dint of their conquerability and strategic importance for world domination. The lines of assault that connect these “continents” are nearly quaint, as if players could repress the fact of ICBMs (already in place in the United States and introduced in the Soviet Union in 1957, the same year the game was released in France) while they moved pieces from, say, the nearly nationless block of North and West Africa—part of France’s colonial empire—to Brazil. *Sputnik* was launched the same year as the game.

*La conquête du monde*’s creator, Albert Lamorisse, divided Southeast Asia into Siam and Indochine, blithely ignoring the fact that the French had evacuated their long-held colonies there in 1954, the very year he patented the game.<sup>1</sup> But one can find Irkutsk, Tchita (an obscure part of Asian Russia just above eastern Mongolia), and Yakutsk. This naming scheme cannot be explained as historical. Kazakhstan is prominent. So is Sibérie. The heartland of Russia, a name that does not appear, becomes “Oural.” In other words, as the Soviet Union vied to unite Asia under communism, the game divided the largest, and arguably the most politically charged, continent into a series of territories hidden behind exotic names only geography buffs would know. Ukraine and the Caucasus guard the eastern flank of Europe, with Pologne and Roumanie giving way to Allemagne, Italie, France, and Espagne, and the remaining European nations are delineated even if they remain unnamed. Europe is intact. By contrast, the Soviet Union is a nonentity that melts into the expanse of Asia, whose linchpin is the massive Asian heartland of Sin Kiang, Tibet, and Chine, a single body that



borders six territories. Perhaps in a nod to Western color-coding conventions, Asia is communist pink; it is also the hardest continent to master and the greatest prize. A player can block Asia from being won from four of the other five continents, although the precise means remain obscure: the air and seas are inert. This is an escapist world of continental land wars closer to Napoleon than the Cold War.

In the first American version, issued by Parker Brothers in 1959, the imagery and names betray a range of adjustments for the US audience. On the box cover, the word *RISK* is written in hot red across a white globe, with a huge exclamation point stretching nearly the height of the box. The dramatic punctuation frames a pale blue triangle that suggests a global-scale searchlight. The change in name and imagery nudged the realities of the Cold War forward, but the game map, virtually unchanged, maintained the cozy fiction of slow, plodding wars. The now many-colored board, vaguely resembling camouflage, sharpened some of the geopolitical realities in ways that continue to resonate. Ukraine is now massive, a great bulwark against the East. Foreshadowing the EU, European nationhood disappeared, and only Great Britain is named—like



Figure 6.9: Miro Company's 1957 game board for *La conquête du monde*.

post-Brexit Europe. The Soviet Union remains absent, jigsawed into a puzzle of exotic or depoliticized territories, some revised—anyone for Kamchatka? As the map stretches into Asia, the most obvious change appears in Korea: a purple number 2 obscures the peninsula, as if military intelligence had redacted the game. This was clearly a deliberate gesture, since the purple 2 refers to the number of additional armies a player earns by controlling the Australian “continent.” This utterly ageographical symbol is the only place on the board where this pattern of numbers elides a place name. In the many iterations since 1959, most of these moves remain part of the game map. At least Korea is now blessedly blank. As so many scholars of cartography point out, maps lie through omission and abstraction. But *Risk* seems to be revealing inconvenient truths through its lies. We can only wonder what children—and adults—have learned from these game maps. Perhaps a future version will divide the United States into blue, red, and purple.

# Empire Preference

## Interwar British Empire Trade Games

Holly Nielsen



Figure 6.10: Game box for *The Game of British Empire, or, Trading with the Colonies*.

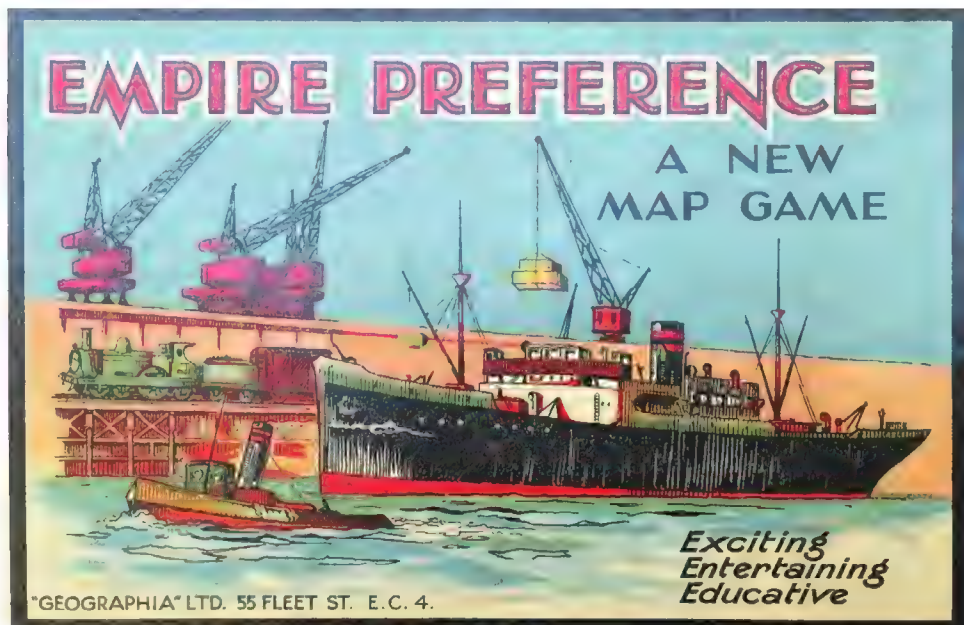


Throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, the British Empire was a continued source of inspiration for British board game designers and publishers. How the empire was framed, and what its representation was expected to teach the players, went through various phases. Games such as *The Game of British Empire*, or, *Trading with the Colonies* and *Empire Preference* are emblematic of one such phase that occurred in interwar Britain. These games were published between 1925 and 1930, and while the exact dates of their publication are unknown, they are illustrative of how the British government wished the empire to be viewed by the metropole during this period, and how opportunistic game publishers used this governmental push to create educational games.

These two games appeared concurrently with the Empire Marketing Board (EMB), a government body founded to promote empire trade and encourage people to engage with the empire and its products. Both are map-based race games—with the empire demarcated in red—and both aim to educate children about which products come from different parts of the empire, and which products Britain exports. Their art is notably nationalistic: *The Game of British Empire* features Britannia, the female personification of Britain, clasping her trident and Union Jack shield while proudly looking out at large cargo ships on the sea, equating national pride with overseas trade.

*The Game of British Empire's* subtitle, *Trading with the Colonies*, implies the essential role that trade played in the British Empire.<sup>1</sup> *Empire Preference* strived for a sense of educational and geographic legitimacy as the rules state, "An important feature of this game is that the squares in which the pieces move are

Figure 6.11: Game box for *Empire Preference*.



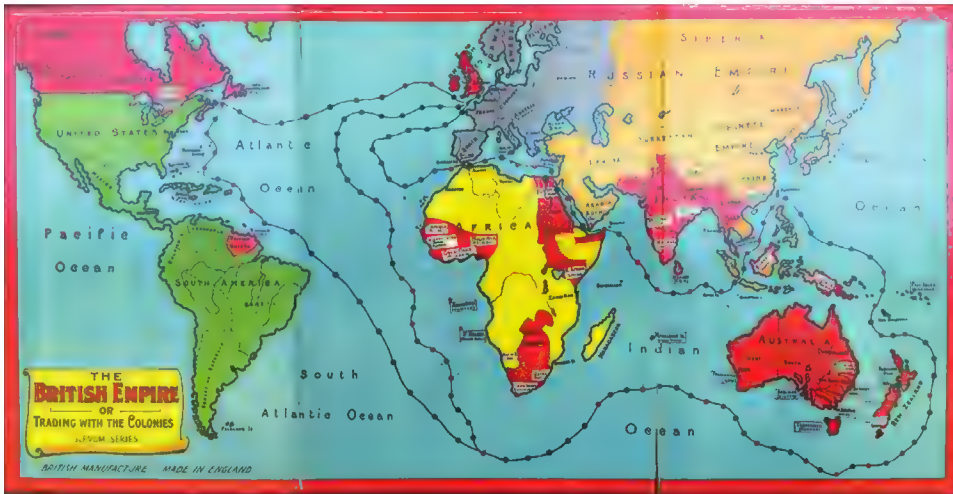


Figure 6.12: Game board for *Empire Preference*.

made up from actual latitude and longitude lines.”<sup>2</sup> The name *Empire Preference* refers to the free trade debates occurring during the time.<sup>3</sup> The British government had considered charging tariffs on imports and exempting empire goods, thus creating an imperial preference. However, such tariffs would go against free trade ideals, risk raising food prices, and so were potentially politically toxic. The EMB, and the types of messages found in these board games, hoped to influence consumer behavior without the need for tariffs.



Figure 6.13: Game board for *The Game of British Empire, or, Trading with the Colonies*.

The ending space in this game, despite being north of Russia, is marked by a huge Union Jack. The square that contains London is one of the most beneficial on the board, awarding the players bonus points on their next move. Both games present trade as an exchange between countries, but one that ultimately benefits British prosperity above others: all paths lead back to Britain, whether figuratively or literally. Imperial colonies are reduced to their main export and depicted as a resource for Britain. Empire is the only context in which all other countries are presented; the imperial preference is clear.

Stephen Constantine has noted how prolific the EMB was in its approach to schools, reporting that "by May 1933 some 27,000 schools, most schools in Britain, were on the EMB's mailing list," through which they received jigsaw puzzles, posters, and other materials.<sup>4</sup> Children who played these games could have been familiar with their forms of representation, as the games paralleled the art adorning the classroom walls. It is unknown if the EMB directly commissioned these games, but it is clear that both game manufacturers and the EMB were engaging in an overlapping public discourse around trade and empire.

The message of British strength through imperial trade promoted in the games was also noticeably similar to those circulated by the BBC (and central to its mission) during this period.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the game publishers were hoping to use the propaganda, advertisements, pamphlets, films, and public lectures created by the EMB by making their games thematically identical and aesthetically similar to the EMB's output. Board game manufacturers such as Valentine & Sons and Chad Valley had long capitalized on current events to boost sales, from games about the Boer War and World War I to games themed around the struggle for women's suffrage. By aligning their designs with EMB material, publishers continued to use public discourse to create relevant and marketable products.

The space of empire, depicted as it is in the games explored here, would have been a common and recognizable sight to the games' players. Unlike the posters on classroom walls, these games tell the player how to move across this space, and the rules not only guide the player but add a temporal element. Introducing a playable aspect to these imperial maps enables players to move themselves within the space and become actors in the process and framework of empire. Exploitative trade and the complexities of empire are reduced to a low-stakes game that only shows benefits to the intended young audience. These games have directions; they also have a beginning and an end. Empire and the rhetoric of imperial preference became not just holdable in the hands of a child but could be "completed" in one playful sitting.



# Encountering Central and South American Cultures

D. Medina Lasansky



Figure 6.14: Detail of *Tikal* game box.

In the 1840s, the British illustrator Frederick Catherwood and John Lloyd Stephens, an American lawyer and president of the Panama Railroad Company, sold twenty thousand copies of their book on Mayan architecture, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan*. Stephens was already a well-known travel writer and author of several books, including one in which he followed in the footsteps of Lord Byron in Greece and Turkey. As a result of their work, the Maya were placed within the larger context of the ancient Western world.

Catherwood and Stephens visited Central America when the region was engulfed in a bloody civil war. Their detailed descriptions and drawings, which provided glimpses of ruins before the changes caused by deterioration, restoration campaigns, and tourism, gave birth to the field of Mayan archaeology. Their focus on big sites, elite architecture, and monumental art typified Mayan studies for next 160 years. The pair's work also presaged a popular interest in Latin American culture in the first decades of the twentieth century that included Mayan Revival forms popularized by Frank Lloyd Wright (most notably the Hollyhock House, built in Los Angeles between 1919 and 1921) and Robert Stacy-Judd. Traveling without sophisticated maps and local guides, Catherwood and Stephens also established the Anglo-American notion of danger and discovery in the jungle. Thus they ultimately formulated a model for the combination scholar-treasure hunter-adventurer that has seen countless popular-cultural reiterations from Indiana Jones to Lara Croft to Nathan Drake of the *Uncharted* franchise.

The 1999 Ravensburger game *Tikal* builds on this fascination with Mesoamerican culture while reaffirming age-old stereotypes of "discovery" by the non-indigenous. Named after the largest of the Mayan sites in northern Guatemala, the game puts players in the role of archaeologists leading expeditions into the jungle in the hopes of exposing terrain, sites, and maybe even treasure. Players are rewarded for occupying temples, holding on to treasure, and acquiring masks. Artwork and components further the theme. The game board's quasi-Mayan glyphs function as a score track along the board's perimeter. The cover of the original game box featured a menacing (but only remotely Mayan) stone mask, partially concealed behind jungle overgrowth. A 2016 "Super Meeple" edition replaced the original graphics with a depiction of figures approaching a vegetation-encrusted temple, figures that bear not-unintentional resemblances to the Jones, Croft, and Drake typology. This updated version improved on the original edition's stacked cardboard tiles by adding three-dimensional miniature plastic temples that grew in layers as the game progressed.

Ravensburger released a second Mesoamerican-themed game in 2002 by the same team that designed *Tikal*. *Mexica*, however, shifts the player's perspective from one of outside encounter and appropriation to inside Aztec culture centuries before European contact (*Mexica* is the Nahuatl name of the Aztecs). The game has players plotting the development of the city of Tenochtitlán on an island in Lake Texcoco, on the site of present-day Mexico City. Players attempt to

partition the island into *calpulli*, or districts, placing buildings in these districts and constructing canals. Districts are formed by surrounding areas of the island with water and then placing a district marker. Canals and Lake Texcoco act as a quick method of moving throughout the city. Players erect bridges and move from one bridge to the next. The original edition of *Mexica* has art and components similar to that found in *Tikal*; a later Super Meeple version has upgraded components like those in the newer edition of *Tikal*.

At the time of Hernán Cortés's conquest and destruction of Tenochtitlán, the city had more than one million inhabitants (when London had a population of just fifty thousand). Tenochtitlán was remarkable—with wide, straight streets, large houses, public gardens, a temple that was larger than the cathedral of Seville in Spain, a zoo, and a sprawling market square and palace. Four causeways connected the man-made island to the mainland. Canoes plied the surrounding waters. Bridges abounded. The men accompanying Cortés compared the impressive capital city to Venice. Once again, the New World was contextualized within the Old.

*Cuzco* is a 2018 retheming of Kiesling and Kramer's 2000 game *Java*, and as such it forms a trilogy with *Tikal* and *Mexica* that covers the three most prominent Mesoamerican cultures. A classic tiling game, *Cuzco's* goal is to create Incan settlements, populate them, build temples (although Incas did not have temples), and host festivals. Like *Mexica*, *Cuzco* positions players within the indigenous community before contact with European conquistadores.

By 1492 the Incas constituted the largest empire in the Americas, with a population of fourteen



Figure 6.15: *Mexica* game board and components.



Figure 6.16: Game of *Cuzco* under way.





Figure 6.17: Cuzco game box.

million and a territory that included central Chile, northern Argentina, highland Peru, and Bolivia. These were drastically different environments, with diverse human inhabitants united by a tremendously advanced society featuring a highly developed system of agriculture, sophisticated metallurgical technologies, textile production and bridges, distinctive stone architecture, and brain surgery. The empire's enormous scale required great organization and governance from its capital in Cuzco. All told, it rivaled the Chinese and Ottoman empires in the Old World. Perhaps because the theme was pasted onto an earlier game, *Cuzco* provides almost no context for Incan culture, its diversity, or achievements.

The Maya, Aztecs, and Incas were large empire-building cultures marked by impressive artistic, scientific, and architectural accomplishments. From the first period of European contact through the centuries that followed, they have piqued popular interest around the world. Representations of these cultures and their "discovery" by Anglo-European adventurers continue to make popular subjects of films, digital games, and board games. The long list of tabletop games with themes that trade on such mythologies—*Lost Cities*, *Inca Empire*, *Incan Gold*—continues to grow. History loves empires. But let's not forget that there were also a range of smaller cultures that were ignored in the process—thousands in Mexico alone. Perhaps their histories and lifeways would make good themes for a new generation of games.

# Pandemic

## When the Abstract Becomes Concrete

José P. Zagal



Figure 6.18: *Pandemic* game board with cubes marking infected cities and player tokens representing different specializations.

In 2008 Z-Man Games released a collaborative board game designed by Matt Leacock with the unassuming title *Pandemic*. The game went on to see massive commercial success, win numerous awards, and led to expansions and spin-offs such as *Pandemic: Legacy Season 1* (2015). *Pandemic* was perhaps prescient of the challenges the world would later face with the COVID-19 pandemic: how do you prevent and manage the spread of an infectious disease (four, in the case of the game) that knows no political boundaries? Well, first you must recognize that it is a global-scale problem that can only be addressed through collective effort.

*Pandemic* is played by two to four players, each assuming the role of an individual specialist. The game board depicts a map of the world with different cities marked out and connected by red lines. Players move their pawns along these lines, developing a sequence of actions that aim to eradicate diseases that propagate from turn to turn. Each specialist has an ability designed to make this task easier: for example, the Medic is more effective when treating disease-infected cities, while the Scientist requires fewer resources for discovering the cures. Players race against time to achieve the common goal of eradicating all four diseases before too many outbreaks occur. As is common in collaborative games, there are no individual goals or scores. The “enemy” is the game’s system itself, and everyone shares the rewards (victory) or penalties (loss) of their decisions.<sup>1</sup>

The game’s primary challenge comes from the need to coordinate the players’ travel around the board. Movement is key, because being “on-site” is critical to succeeding in the game. Removing infection cubes and discovering a cure require that the player who is performing the action’s pawn be in the city where the infection has occurred or where a research station exists respectively. Fortunately, travel is free from the realities of time, money, and international geopolitics. In fact, the game board dispenses with international boundaries and frontiers entirely.

So what meaning should we make from the game’s depiction of the world and how it is connected? My home city, Santiago, Chile, is the only location on the map with a single connection. In the board’s design, Chile fared better than New Zealand and other states in the South Pacific that are entirely absent from the map. Europe and Asia stand in contrast to both Africa and South America in that they are highly interconnected, with four or five connections per city. Across continents, there are only three links from North America to Asia and only two to Europe, and these all run through the United States. *Pandemic*’s board is obviously a simplified representation of the ways that international travel happens in real life; for instance, Santiago–Buenos Aires is a busy route for commercial air travel.

An image posted by Matt Leacock to the popular website BoardGameGeek and labeled as “Pandemic Version .1” shows a collection of nodes, labeled with numbers or letters, connected to each other by colored lines. It is nothing like a map of the world. In a comment for a second image, this one labeled “Pandemic version .2,” Leacock explains: “Once I had the engine in place



I made this prototype in Illustrator. I used urban density to select the cities for the game, although I had to skip over cities that would be too close together on the board. At this point, the map has 52 cities.<sup>2</sup> The final map has forty-eight.

*Pandemic's* map is the result of (mostly) arbitrary representational choices. The game was never intended as a simulation. Liberties were taken for the purpose of ensuring an interesting and engaging experience of play. Cities were added and removed, and connections between them were modified to maintain a balance between challenge, ease of play, risk, and reward. There were also practical considerations; large cities that were too close to others were ignored, and "the final map uses a different projection which made it possible . . . to fit it on a more reasonably-sized board."<sup>3</sup>

Despite this, the game emphasizes, as we have seen with the COVID-19 pandemic, that it is not geographic proximity but rather connectedness that facilitates the spread of diseases. In the game, Istanbul and Hong Kong are "risky" because they each have six connections to other cities: an outbreak will spread more widely than in Santiago—with its single connection. On the other hand, the game is surprisingly egalitarian; any city on the map is equally likely to be randomly selected as one of the initial infected cities. Rich or poor, large or small—they are all part of the same global situation. An infection in Santiago can be just as important as one in Madrid: if players do nothing, things will undoubtedly worsen and affect the rest of the world. There is more sense and prescience to *Pandemic* than meets the eye. It both warned and taught us that global connectedness exacerbates the problem (disease spreads as fast as we can travel) as well as provides the solution (international collaboration is critical to understanding the disease and developing a cure), and that we should care about what happens in other places of the world (an outbreak anywhere can affect you). Perhaps we were simply having too much fun to pay attention?

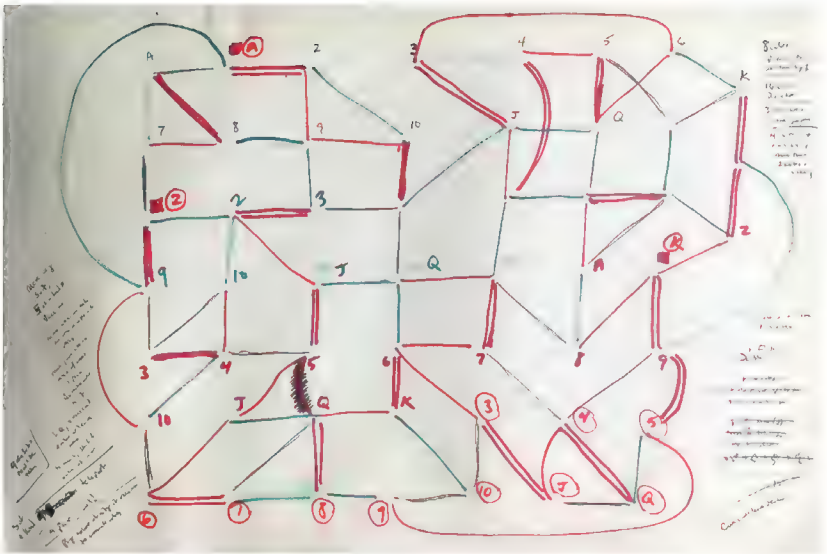


Figure 6.19: Matt Leacock's first prototype game board.

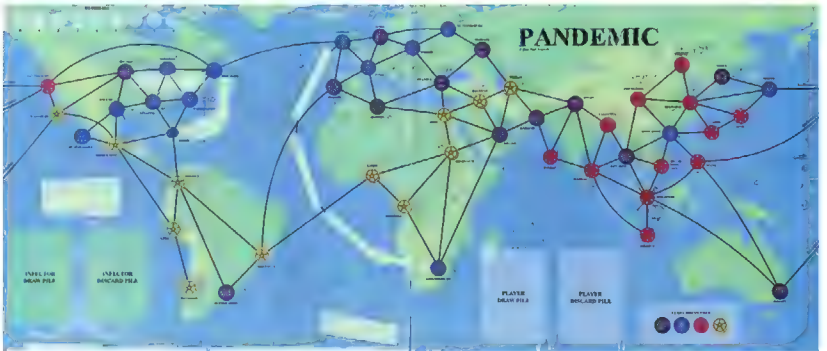


Figure 6.20: Matt Leacock's second iteration game board.





# **Identity, Community, Disparity**





# Magical Thinking and Cultural Amnesia on the Western Frontier

Abigail A. Van Slyck



Figure 7.1: The Game of Buffalo Bill game board.

Board games encourage a form of magical thinking, in which a small rectangle of cardboard becomes an inhabitable space with ample scope for movement and action. One of the most expansive spaces evoked in such games has been the American West, especially in the postwar period, when manufacturers capitalized on the popularity of television Westerns, issuing games such as *Hopalong Cassidy* and *Gunsmoke*. Yet the phenomenon has a longer history. *The Lone Ranger Game* was produced in 1938, and the *Bandit Trail Game Featuring Gene Autry* in 1929. The focus of this essay—*The Game of Buffalo Bill*—is even older, dating from the last years of the nineteenth century, when the western frontier stood at the center of contemporary debates about the future of white America.

Parker Brothers issued *The Game of Buffalo Bill*, in which players emulate the famous bison hunter William F. Cody, in 1898. The year of the game's release is noteworthy, as just five years earlier, the historian Frederick Jackson Turner had bemoaned the closing of the frontier, which he argued was integral to giving American democracy its particular form and spirit.<sup>1</sup> Via *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* shows, which ran from 1884 to 1913, Cody kept the frontier open for his urban audiences, staging spectacles of Western dangers—including Indian attacks on settler cabins—calculated to provide a vicarious thrill. Perhaps *The Game of Buffalo Bill* could bring a similar frontier-by-proxy experience into the middle-class parlor, a site many late-nineteenth-century critics associated with doting mothers and milquetoast sons.<sup>2</sup>

To be sure, the racial logic of the game parallels that of Turner's *Frontier Thesis* and the *Wild West* shows. The players—the ones enjoying agency in the game—are implicitly white. They start and finish the game at the "Camp," a label without a racial modifier, as whiteness here is the unmarked norm. Visual cues help convey the racial identity of the site, where an American flag flutters over rows of military-style tents facing a parade ground guarded by armed white men. The whiteness of this locale is confirmed by the presence of an "Indian Camp" in another vignette. (Of course, "Native American" had not yet entered the lexicon, but the word "Indian" was anything but value-free; whites often used it interchangeably with "savage.") Although the Indian camp, too, is guarded by a man with a rifle, everything else about it highlights the differences between the two settings and their human inhabitants: the irregular arrangement of colorful tepees, the figures' hunched postures, the blankets in which some of them are wrapped, and the feathers that others wear in their headbands. Tellingly, the Indian camp is not a site of agency; when players land on a space labeled "captured by Indians," they move their playing piece to the Indian camp, where the game board instructs them to "wait 2 spins and then start from [the space labeled] Rescue." Indeed, there are four spaces where players can be "captured by Indians," two others where they can be "chased back 6 spaces by Indians," and just one where they confront a buffalo stampede. In short, Indians are the primary impediment to a successful hunt.





Figure 7.2: Detail of the "Camp," from *The Game of Buffalo Bill*.

At the same time, *The Game of Buffalo Bill* is remarkably tame. For one thing, the object of the game is to capture at least ten buffalo before beating a hasty return to camp. Cody, of course, did not capture buffalo; he killed them. He purportedly killed over four thousand in an eight-month period in 1867 and 1868 and even nicknamed his rifle "Lucretia Borgia" in acknowledgment of the gun's alluring deadliness.<sup>3</sup> Yet, in the game's vignette of the hunt, the white hunters are unarmed. (One swings a lasso in an improbable attempt to rope a galloping buffalo.) Even being captured by Indians is a sedate affair. The seized player simply sits out two turns, certain in the knowledge of rescue; how or by whom is not specified. The game's sinuous path—its form undoubtedly meant to suggest the uncultivated character of the landscape—would not be out of place in a Picturesque garden. Even the game board's pastel color palette seems calculated to allay any sense of danger. Yes, two of the game board's corners contain images of Native American weapons, but even these are displayed as trophies, material proof that white Americans had subdued the continent's original inhabitants.

Inevitability is endemic to *The Game of Buffalo Bill*, as in many board games. An indicator tells players how many spaces to move, ultimately determining the victor. While players may not know at the start of the game who will win, they can rest assured that one of their number, always imagined as white, will return to camp unscathed, having laid claim to the land by seizing control of its resources. In that sense, the indicator is like the deity who (in the minds of many white Americans) dictated that the nation's manifest destiny was to occupy the continent from coast to coast.

Figure 7.3: Detail of the "Indian Camp," from *The Game of Buffalo Bill*.



If *The Game of Buffalo Bill* was a pallid version of the frontier experience Turner had valued so highly, it may have contributed something even more integral to normalizing white domination of North America. By inviting players to inhabit an imaginary space where frontier conflict was reduced to a gentle stroll along a pastel-colored path, this board game encouraged a form of magical thinking that amounted to a deep cultural amnesia about the violence—including the racial violence—inherent in the taking of the continent.

# Food Sovereignty as Game Design in *The Gift of Food*

Elizabeth LaPensée



Figure 7.4: *The Gift of Food* game board.



*The Gift of Food* is a Coast Salish board game centered on food sovereignty—the activation of the rights of Indigenous people to determine their own access to, care of, and use of traditional foods. As the Muckleshoot nutrition educator and writer Valerie Segrest asserts, food is a foundational need that encourages people to work in reciprocity with the land. In the game’s guidebook, Segrest elaborates: “It will take all of us to encourage the health of the land. Food is the right place to begin.” *The Gift of Food* facilitates reciprocal relationships through seasonal gameplay and mechanics informed by Indigenous cultural values, including collaboration, stewardship, generosity, and gratitude.

The board unfolds into a compilation of ecosystems illustrated by the Lower Elwha S’Klallam storyteller and artist Roger Fernandes. Although the ecosystems are factually accurate, their placement is fictional to avoid the risks of sharing Indigenous knowledge. Gameplay reinforces the relationships between ecosystems and how to navigate them but requires being from within the community to know specifics, such as where the best berry patches are.

Players represent a family in a village along the river that connects them to land and distant villages. Each player has a game mat with woven baskets, and players collectively decide to play through a single season or through an entire year, including winter. Turns involve pulling and reading a scenario card, then choosing one from a set of options that leads to an outcome. Gameplay is just as rela-



Figure 7.5: *The Gift of Food* basket player mat.

tional to land as it is to the seasons. Fish, including salmon and eulachon, migrate from their ancestral streams down the river to the sea and return to spawn, while others reside in the river year-round.

The game’s focus is to gather, trade, and share Food Gifts, which are represented by tokens with icons that depict their food group. Across ecosystems, they include Roots (e.g., camas bulbs, wapato tubers), Birds (e.g., duck, grouse), Fish (e.g., salmon, trout, halibut), Greens (e.g., seaweed nori, nettle shoots, spruce tips, sprouts), Berries (e.g., cranberries, salmonberries, wild strawberries), Nuts (e.g., hazelnuts, acorns), Wild Game (e.g., deer, elk), and Seafood (e.g., clams, mussels, crabs).

Gathering Food Gifts is not without risk. Scenarios can include complications such as unfavorable weather, predatory animals, and unfortunate outcomes if

players act greedily or unwisely. For example, while Saltwater Beaches may be great places to gather food, they can be dangerous, with rocks that require careful balance and tides that can quickly turn. Wounds or sickness can be healed by using Medicines, but players must always consider their Wellbeing by keeping track of what is available in their baskets.

Food Gifts are inseparable from their ecosystems and the decisions made on the land. Players may come across a scenario card that offers an opportunity to receive a Stewardship Bonus that can later be traded for any Food Gift of the player's choosing. The Prairies offer opportunities to enact stewardship by burning the land to release nutrients into the soil, thus preventing trees from taking over. This act of reciprocity increases the bounty of camas bulbs in the following season.

Stewardship Bonuses can also be achieved by pruning plants, letting enough animals and fish live to ensure the next generations, protecting nesting grounds, and modifying land, such as moving sand on beaches to form "clam gardens" to increase the availability of clams. Enacting collaboration, stewardship, generosity, and gratitude can give a player the edge for winning the game. At the end of a game, individuals assess what Food Gifts they have in their basket and may exchange Stewardship Bonuses for any preferred Food Gifts. Notably, the winner is determined not by the total number of Food Gifts but by the variety of food in basket. If players choose to play all the way through winter, then the final round is a Potlatch Gathering. The winner is whoever can give the most Food Gifts with the highest diversity to the community feast. You win based on how much you give away rather than how much you keep to yourself. Both modes of winning center cultural values.

Although *The Gift of Food* takes place before colonization, it considers present day issues of concern, including pollution and climate change. For example, fully grown cattails were not included as Food Gifts, since cattails are often unsafe to eat because of their ability to cleanse water by absorbing toxins. Players must also contend with sudden changes in weather and tides. If a situation arises, they may ask another player to trade food for medicine (and hope they help). In the yearlong game, the shared goal is to survive through the winter. Whatever adversities or accomplishments, the heart of the game evokes reciprocity with land with hope for abundance.



Figure 7.6: Food Gift tokens from *The Gift of Food*.

### Seagull Eggs

SPRING

*While digging clams on the beach, you notice that the seagulls are nesting on a rock offshore. This is the perfect time to collect eggs. Dark clouds are heading your way so you will have to hurry to avoid the storm.*

#### OPTIONS:

- A. Paddle to the rock in your canoe to harvest eggs now
- B. Consult an elder for tips on collecting seagull eggs before you go out
- C. You are tired from digging clams! Choose another Family who is willing to harvest seagull eggs with you first thing in the morning

#### OUTCOMES:

Seagull Eggs

- A. The wind and waves pick up as you are paddling to the rock. Seagulls dive bomb you as you get close, so you decide to head back without eggs.
- B. The elder tells you to wait until morning when the seagulls are calm. You follow her advice and are able to get a basket of eggs.  
**+1 Birds to your Wellbeing**
- C. Waiting was worth it. You and your friend were able to get eggs for both of your Families!  
**+1 Birds to both Families' Wellbeing**

Figure 7.7: Seagull Eggs scenario from *The Gift of Food*.

Figure 7.8: Stewardship Bonus in *The Gift of Food*.

### Stewardship Bonus Tokens

Stewardship Bonus tokens represent ways that you care for the land and promote the abundance and diversity of native foods. They are awarded to you based on your actions during Scenarios.



*At the end of the game, you exchange your Stewardship Bonus tokens for Food tokens of your choosing. The player with the most Stewardship Bonus tokens gets to choose tokens first.*

### Acknowledgments

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# The Leisure Divide

## Board Games and Race

Dianne Harris



Figure 7.9: Game box for *The Black Experience: American History Game*.

Presumptions about leisure—how it is imagined and represented, who has it, and who it is for—have long contributed to the generation of race and class identities in the United States. Images of white families engaged in various leisure activities contributed to an iconography of whiteness that could (and often does) substitute for a verbal lexicon that might otherwise require the use of explicitly racist language.<sup>1</sup> Board games are part of this much larger material and representational field. Most games, like nearly every item marketed to US consumers, were designed, manufactured, and marketed for a presumed white audience. Even more narrowly, they were designed for white, heterosexual, nuclear families. Ideas about race and gender/sexuality are deeply intertwined in game design just as they are elsewhere throughout culture and society. As the box top for *The Game of Life* indicates, it is a “family game” intended to promote the kind of heteronormative “family togetherness” that became increasingly promoted after World War II, when America’s economy likewise depended on that particular structure for the accelerated consumption of consumer goods.<sup>2</sup> Leisure—the ability to have free time and to spend it equally freely and as one wishes, and for purely recreational or relaxing purposes—has become symbolic both of whiteness and of middle-class identities.

A 1966 Milton Bradley advertisement describes its top-selling games as “sensational” and “zany.”<sup>3</sup> Could only white consumers envision themselves engaging in leisure activities that connected them to attributes such as “zany” and “sensational”? Imposed white norms of respectability combined with the behavioral codes required of Black families for their safety demanded levels of decorum from the latter that the former need not have concerned themselves with in the past or now.

Nevertheless, some games were designed and marketed specifically for Black Americans. Tellingly, these games were quite different from those designed with a white-by-default audience in mind. Rather than zany or sensational, they were instead primarily serious and didactically focused, aimed at educating Black families and their children about the value of Black culture, or attempting to provide strategies for survival and liberation through family play. The games and their graphics support Black respectability, but within a very narrow range of representational options. In the imagination of game designers and manufacturers, for Black families, time away from work, it seems, was time to be used productively.

For example, *Pursuit: The Black Man Strides towards Equity* (1954–1970) is a game that focuses on the history of the civil rights movement. Similarly, *The Black Experience: American History Game* from 1971 and *African-American Discovery*, which was subtitled “An Exciting Black History Game,” both endeavored to instruct and uplift rather than to simply entertain. The box covers for each of these games depict events from Black history through either photographs or drawings. *African-American Discovery* included an illustration of a Black family



Figure 7.10: Children playing the game *Black Explorers*.

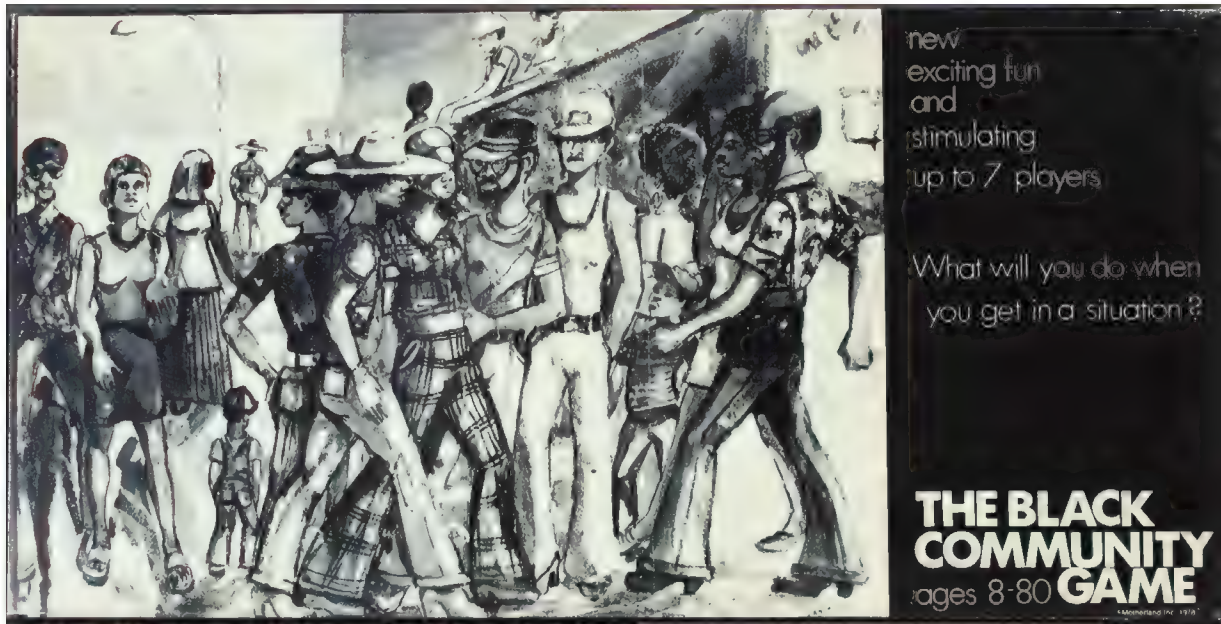


Figure 7.11: Game box for *The Black Community Game*.



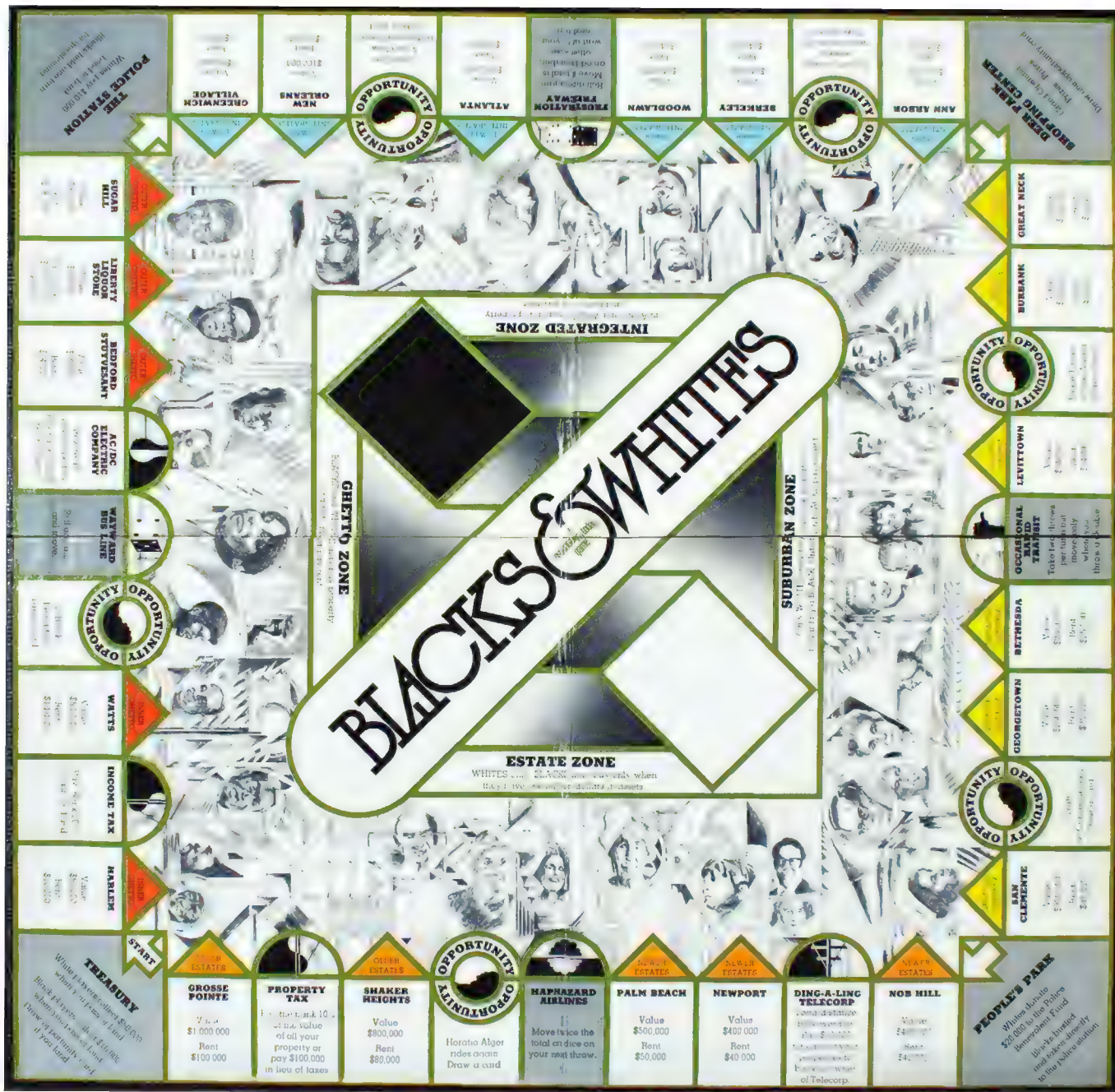


Figure 7.12: Game board for Blacks & Whites.

playing the game together, the father's arms encircling his smiling family; the game's explicit intention was to help families learn and to reinforce knowledge about African Americans and their contribution to American history. Perhaps most poignant of all is *The Black Community Game: What Will You Do When You Get in a Situation?* Designed for players ages eight to eighty, the game presents scenarios that teach players how to navigate the social and cultural challenges faced by Black people and illustrates ways the community can interact and cooperate to help its members survive and thrive.

One of the few games to bridge the Black and white experience (with an emphasis on spatial politics) was the 1970 game *Blacks & Whites*. Produced by *Psychology Today* magazine and borrowing heavily from *Monopoly*, the game intended to convey "something of what it's like to go through life being forced to play with a stacked deck." White players start with more money; game mechanics steer Black players' property purchases toward "ghetto" (Sugar Hill, Watts) and racially integrated areas on the board (Berkeley, New Orleans) rather than towards Grosse Pointe, Levittown, and other predominantly white communities within the "estate zone" and "suburban zone." Players draw from a collection of segregated "opportunity cards" with events such as one in which Black militants amend the building code to "force slum property owners to pay a \$50,000 fine for each property."<sup>4</sup>

Why are the majority of games for Black families primarily educational or focused on "a celebration of Black identity"?<sup>5</sup> Alternatives surely exist. One can imagine Afro-futurist board games that would move players through visually enticing Black utopias, immersed in exciting adventure routes that emphasize goal achievement and Black joy while also entertaining participants. Instead, board games continued to follow the didactic model with examples like 2012's *Freedom: The Underground Railroad* game, in which players join abolitionists in efforts to lead slaves to freedom.

We also might ask why the representational field for Black leisure is so limited, and why "zany" fun is imagined as being only for whites. What should we make of these different ways of imagining "play" for Black and white audiences? Fundamentally, the games demonstrate what Jessie Whitehead has called "the limited presence of visual narratives of Black Americans," a problem that sits at the heart of work by artists such as Kerry James Marshall and Betye Saar and has been the subject of inquiry by scholars such as Tricia Rose and Kellie Jones.<sup>6</sup> As Rose has demonstrated, the representational spectrum for depicting Black lives is narrow and constraining, such that Black cultural expression—particularly expressions of Black pleasure—is "a thorny struggle."<sup>7</sup>

Representations of Black fun, frivolity, and the luxurious freedom of leisure time spent in play remain relatively scarce. Instead, often portraying Black people as dangerous, angry, or as threats to the social order (including a range of known and damaging negative stereotypes), representational conventions

for the depiction of Black life and leisure remain ridiculously impoverished, stereotypical, and frequently racist. As such, the “leisure divide” made visible in these games should not surprise. Instead, it helps us see the ways board games are yet one more facet in the material life of a nation that reflects and reinforces damaging stereotypical notions of race and class identity, and the ways leisure activities reveal much about who we are, and who we imagine others to be.



# Clued into Elite Sleuthing

D. Medina Lasansky



Figure 7.13: Detail of the *Clue* game box.

Over its more than half-century history, the game of *Clue* has reinforced a white world of privileged sleuthing. Changes to more recent editions have expanded the backstories, race, and ethnicity of the characters depicted in the game and updated the settings they occupy. Such shifts follow the broadening of protagonists in detective and mystery fiction and film—yet *Clue*'s environment remains elite and distinctly white.

The game is a murder mystery set in a palatial mansion. In most editions up to the 2000s, the floor plan featured a billiard room, ballroom, entrance hall, conservatory, study, library, and other spaces. The aim of the game is to use good detective work to figure out who committed the murder, where in the house, and with what weapon. One of the players is Mrs. White, another (in the original British version) was Mr. Black (Mr. Boddy in the United States). There were also Professor Plum and Colonel Mustard. Most of the players are well-dressed, white-haired Caucasians.

*Clue* was first manufactured in England by John Waddington Ltd. as *Cluedo* in 1949 and simultaneously licensed in the United States to Parker Brothers. It is not surprising that the game was launched during the British crime novel craze. Hercule Poirot, Sherlock Holmes, and the amateur sleuth Miss Marple were all busy investigating crimes at the time. Paying homage (and royalties) to Arthur Conan Doyle, Parker Brothers released its version with the subtitle "The Great New Sherlock Holmes Game." The most widespread mystery subgenre was the whodunits, and *Clue* evinced the hallmarks of any great whodunit. With the game, everyone could become an armchair detective, traversing the mansion's stately rooms, interrogating suspects, and trying to match culprit with weapon and scene of the crime.

*Clue* appeared in the United States when Hollywood's film noir and the hard-boiled school of American crime fiction led by Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler were peaking. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, a slew of mysteries were adapted for the stage, radio, and film. Many featured Sherlock Holmes and his sidekick Dr. Watson. In fact, it has been argued that Holmes is the most seen character in cinema, with the first known film featuring Holmes shot in 1900. So it is not surprising that the board game capitalized on the Sherlock craze. Cross-promotion was also seen in the 1985 translation of the game into a feature film. In the *Clue* movie, six guests were invited to the Hill House mansion (replete with chandeliers, high ceilings, and a majestic staircase) for dinner. Their host was mysteriously murdered—forcing the guests to work with the staff to solve the murder. Three different endings were shown in theaters. As such, even the audience became players.

The world of sleuthing has become more diverse in recent years, thanks to the efforts of Walter Mosley (author of *Devil in a Blue Dress* and the highly acclaimed detective series featuring the African American private investigator Easy Rawlins), John Lde (who introduced readers to Isaiah Quintabe), and

others. As Tarik Abdel-Monem has noted, "Modern writers have brought new perspectives on race, justice, and social inequalities to contemporary crime stories." According to Abdel-Monem, "Unquestionably, today's crime stories have turned the genre as a whole on its head. . . . One would be hard pressed to find a modern work that embraced the Victorian racism of Holmes or the racist and sexist overtones of the hard-boiled genre."<sup>1</sup>

While crime fiction has expanded to offer more diverse characters that function in environments more representative of the real world (Rawlins lives in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles), *Clue's* changes seem incomplete. Miss Scarlet morphed from a white to an Asian woman. In different editions, Mrs. White was a nurse, a middle-aged cook, and a young maid. Later she was replaced by Dr. Orchid, a scientist with a doctorate and Samuel Black's (the owner of the mansion) adopted daughter. A 2008 upgrade transformed the character of Mr. Green into a man of African descent. The mansion depicted in the game has also seen modest updates: various editions feature a spa, theater, garage, and game room. Yet the overall environment and the game's presentation continue to hark back to a century-old upper-class lifestyle. The exclusive spaces and more expansive cast of characters included in recent editions fall short of the strides made in crime fiction and film. Why is that? Does the need to keep the game recognizably familiar limit its ability to fit the times?

The floor plan depicted on *Clue's* game board features secret passages that connect some of the rooms—reifying the perception that sprawling elite homes have concealed spaces known only to those in positions of privilege. This characterization is also seen in recent movies, where large mansions provide a backdrop for whodunit murder mysteries featuring comfortable white families, whether in the acclaimed film *Knives Out* (2019) or the black comedy *Ready or Not* (2019). *Knives Out* explicitly incorporates race into the whodunit genre. There is a lot of talk about immigrants, a Black lieutenant who asks questions of suspects, and Marta Cabrera (played by Ana de Armas), whose nationality no one seems to remember correctly, as she is alternatively referred to as being from Ecuador, Uruguay, and Brazil. She becomes a lead character and inherits the mansion after the death of Harlan Thrombey, to whom she had provided nursing services. As films and fiction redefine the murder mystery genre, can *Clue* keep up?



Figure 7.14: Playing card depicting Mrs. White from *Clue*.



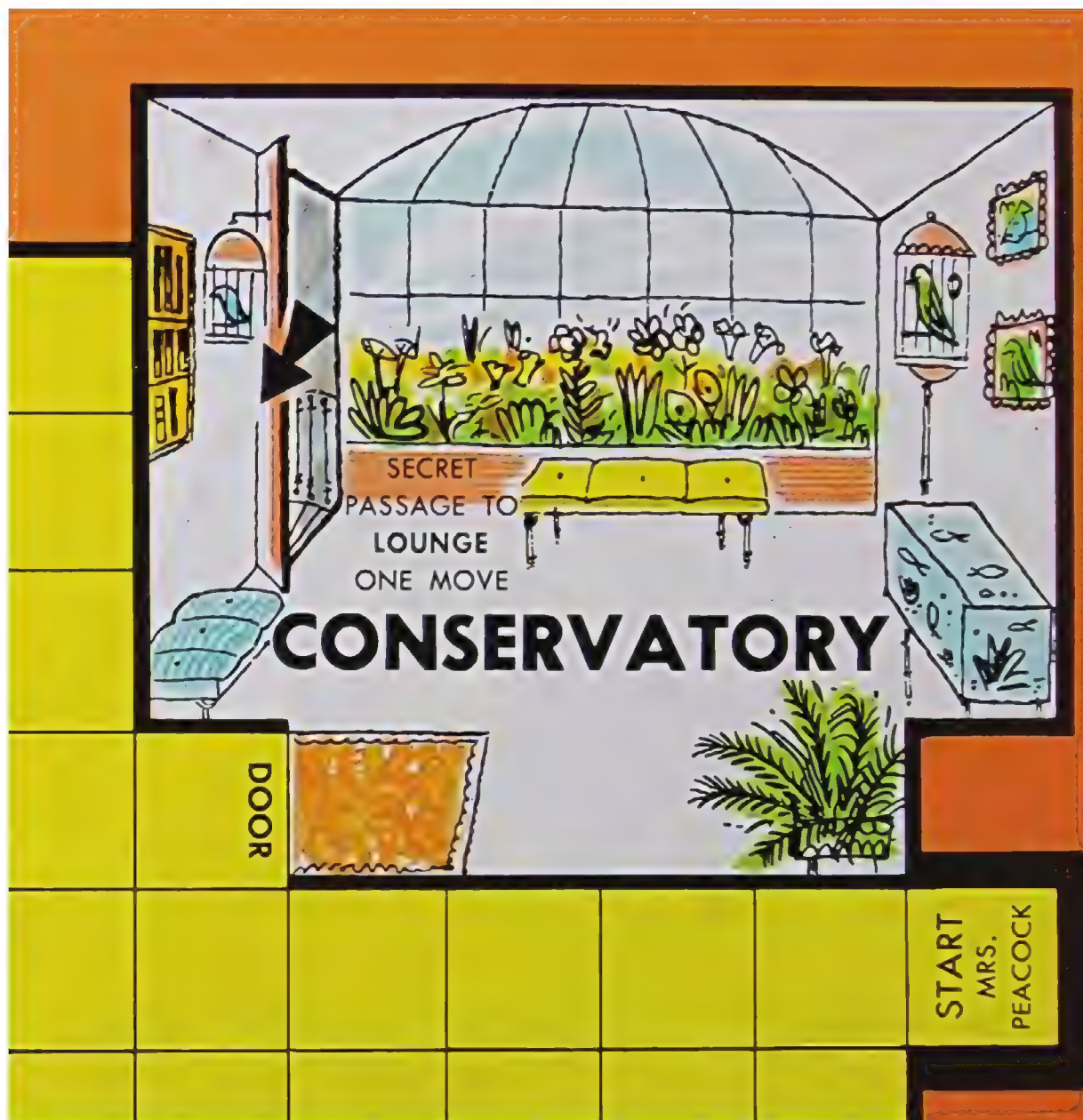


Figure 7.15: Detail of the *Clue* game board.

# Safe Journi

## Negotiating Roads and Culture in Nigeria

Kenechukwu Ogbuagu



Figure 7.16: *Safe Journi* game board, box, and components.

The master of ceremonies had just announced the end of AB Con, thanking the attendees for spending their time enjoying the variety of tabletop games that most people in the room had never seen before. I was still savoring the successful conclusion of the 2017 African Boardgame Convention, an annual event I had started the previous year, when a woman walked up to me. She proceeded to share her opinion of one of my company's games: "I just played *Safe Journi*. I don't like it. It's not for kids, and I think it presents Nigeria badly. I don't like it and won't recommend it for children."

I was taken aback for a second. "The serious-looking woman in her gallant, colorful African wrapper had been drawn into my game!" I thought. Obviously she had taken ownership of *Safe Journi* and had her own ideas of what it could be—what it should be. She did not like the words on some of the cards; they were "insults," and some of them revealed "corrupt practices as solutions" to a road trip in Nigeria.

My critic's valid concerns formed part of the reason why we designed *Safe Journi*, and why we exist at NIBCARD Games: to create games that represent our community in ways that reveal our reality, teach our ways, and instigate conversations between and about us.

*Safe Journi* is a dice-rolling and character-adaptation board game I designed and manufacture through my company, NIBCARD Games. The game's theme represents almost everything you are likely to experience on the roads in Nigeria, especially during interstate travel. We are not entirely proud of some of those representations, even when they are well-founded; and the language, well, you

Figure 7.17: *Safe Journi* game cards during play at the NIBCARD Games Café, Abuja, Nigeria.

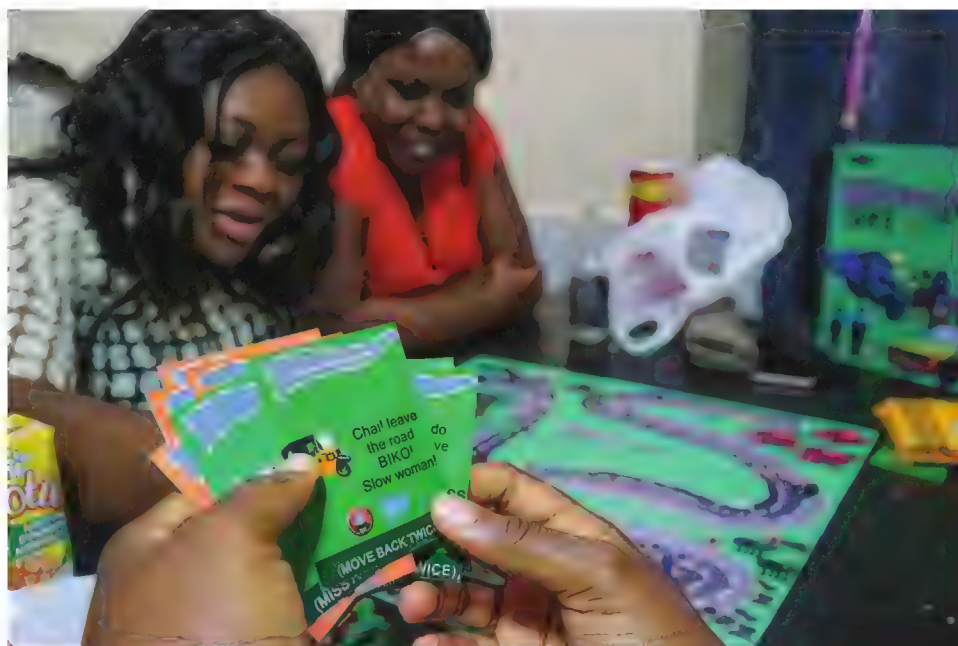






Figure 7.18: An evening at NIBCARD Games Café, Abuja, Nigeria.

probably ask your kids to close their ears when you yell at another “aggressive driver,” especially in Nigerian pidgin English.

In *Safe Jouni*, players race to the end of the road, avoiding the dangers or situations along the way—potholes, people crossing outside of zebra crossings, cows on the road, intimidating security checkpoints, markets encroaching on the road, even bandits. Drivers roll the dice and navigate their car according to the speed and road-lane indicated. When they encounter a situation, they can resolve it using a solution card (bribery, insults, threats, pleas, nepotism, etc.). The game board also reveals popular Nigerian states and cities such as Lagos, Kano, Enugu, and Port Harcourt.

I understand my critic’s perspective. Many Nigerians share similar stereotypes about what tabletop games should and should not be. These assumptions have influenced who belongs to what gaming communities and who does not. Chess is only for brilliant students, Ludo is for idle people, Whot (a popular card game in Nigeria) is for gamblers; in general, games are only for children. As the Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Adichie said, “The problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue but that they are incomplete.”<sup>1</sup> These stereotypes are not complete because games are for everyone; games can be for everyone.

This is my belief, one expressed by NIBCARD Games: that regardless of your identity, your background, or your philosophy, there is always a game for you. I have constantly witnessed barriers being broken, where an elderly person is enjoying a game with a child, where gender, class, or religious disparities are ignored and everyone is playing by the same set of rules. That is the power of games.

In a society that has only recently been introduced to the modern tabletop gaming world, games that do not align with the conventional classics are almost

seen as a problem. Gladly, this is slowly changing. We are witnessing a new bond between games and people. Tabletop games are gradually becoming both useful, needed, and welcome in homes and institutions.

In 2019, we opened NIBCARD Games Café, the first tabletop game café in Nigeria and a project that was crowdfunded for, and received support from, the global tabletop gaming community. This positioned us to witness, support, and encourage various gaming individuals and groups—from professionals who are only free to play on weekends, to game-night hosts who are constantly looking for exciting new social games, to content creators who love to talk or write about games and gamers. The number of African designers and the number of tabletop game cafés in Nigeria are both on the rise.

My conversation at AB Con 2017 was a huge indicator; it was very different from the congratulatory messages I had been receiving all day for hosting what the Nigerian Television Authority termed the first convention of its kind in sub-Saharan Africa. What should games represent? Should designers focus on designing projects that represent an ideal world, or should they tell their own story? Recently, there have been many conversations about representations in the tabletop gaming world—especially representations of others. What does the publisher want? What will the buyers want? Does a barrier exist between designers and their environment; and in this regard, is there a limit to how much designers can represent their own realities, no matter how unfitting? Who owns the moral high ground in determining what games should be and what they should not? It will cost me nothing to make the changes my critic demanded at the event; but will it still be the same story I intended to tell? Would it still be the same game?

I am asking these questions because I do not know the answers.

Personally, I am more than excited about the renaissance of tabletop games, and the potentials and the economic opportunities the value chain will create in Nigeria and Africa, especially with the increasing unemployment rate among young people. My full-time job working as a designer and running a tabletop game café and hub in Abuja, Nigeria, constantly reaffirms how board games are a great tool in bridging relationship gaps and fostering diversity and inclusion regardless of religion, class, age, tribe, or nationality.

# Adolf and the *King of Siam*

Richard A. Ruth



Figure 7.19: *King of Siam* game board and components.



Every Thai schoolchild can repeat the proud historical achievement that distinguishes their kingdom from its neighbors: Siam, as Thailand was known before 1939, was the only Southeast Asian country to avoid colonization by a Western power during the Age of Imperialism. Thai schoolchildren are less aware of why Germany still bears the Western world's opprobrium for its more recent history involving Adolf Hitler's Third Reich and the "Final Solution."<sup>1</sup> The dissonance created by widespread Thai pride for Siam's avoidance of European colonialism and the nation's collective ignorance of Germany's atrocities in World War II lies at the heart of the 2007 German board game *König von Siam* (*King of Siam*).

*King of Siam* is played on a nineteenth-century map of mainland Southeast Asia. Players help Thai, Lao, and Malay kingdoms to establish hegemony while simultaneously working to stave off the loss of kingdoms to British colonial forces. The game is set in 1874, a time when, according to the instructions, "Siam is a target of the European powers, Great Britain and France, both of which are looking to reduce Siam to a colony in their empires." If the British forces (represented by Union Jack pieces) capture four provinces, then "Siam is considered a British colony."

The presentation of the Union Jack as the primary menace in a German area-control board game offers a critical contrast to several popular games with similar rules of play. In the classic World War II game *Axis & Allies*, the game pieces bear the military and national iconography of the combatants. The exception is Germany; Hitler's forces are represented not as swastikas—an image legally prohibited in Germany and several other European countries for much of the postwar period—but as black crosses similar to the Schwarzes Kreuz.

Meanwhile, in contemporary Thailand, Nazi symbolism is seemingly everywhere. Hitler's image adorns sweatshirts, storefronts, toys, and statues and even appears in government messaging. The dozens of students at Chiang Mai's Sacred Heart Catholic School who dressed as Hitler and other Nazi figures for their sports day in September 2011 apparently did not know why their parade caused a stir among the expatriate community, even though, a few years earlier, students at Bangkok's Thewphaingarm School had sparked international outcry for doing the same thing.<sup>2</sup> In 2013, fine-arts students at Thailand's elite Chulalongkorn University created a mural with an image of Hitler as the sole historical figure among comic book superheroes such as a Batman, Superman, and Captain America. Another international uproar occurred when a young entrepreneur named his restaurant "Hitler Fried Chicken"; he agreed to rebrand his shop only after KFC's Thailand franchisee threatened legal action because his Hitler logo resembled KFC's trademarked Colonel Sanders.<sup>3</sup> Even the Thai government's own video advancing its "twelve core values" in 2014 included

cartoon footage of a smiling pupil in an artist's apron and a red beret painting Hitler's portrait in front of a swastika.<sup>4</sup>

What are the reasons for this ubiquity of Nazi symbols? The first is that Thailand's official school curriculum focuses almost exclusively on Thailand's own royalist history, like that described in the *King of Siam* rule booklet, while ignoring most world history, including the Holocaust.<sup>5</sup> The other possible reason for the country's tolerance of Nazi symbols is more complex.

The political scientist Benedict Anderson coined the term "spectre of comparison" for the inversion of historical judgment that makes it possible for non-Western peoples to mitigate Nazi atrocities; Anderson started developing the idea in 1963 after watching Sukarno, the first president of Indonesia, tell an audience about his admiration for Hitler as a nationalist. Anderson wrote that the experience forced him to look at European history through "an inverted telescope" when trying to understand how Sukarno could enthuse about Hitler being "extraordinarily clever."<sup>6</sup> Southeast Asians, Anderson reasoned, could view Western historical episodes "simultaneously close up and from afar" without sharing the specifically Euro-American historical judgments that presumably come with them.<sup>7</sup> Germany's relatively benign record in Southeast Asia makes condemnation of the Third Reich's atrocities in Europe far from universal when viewed through the lens of people whose historical education emphasizes British and French aggression.

*King of Siam* was the brainchild of Peer Sylvester, a German who had taught in Thailand. Sylvester was surprised that his private international school taught only European history while omitting the local history taught to Thais. Sylvester's game map puts territories within Siam that Bangkok would eventually lose to British and French imperialists, a development that still riles Thai nationalists today. It is not difficult to imagine German players enjoying a moment of *schadenfreude* at the positing of the British as historical bogeymen, a position in Western historical popular culture usually occupied by the Germans of World War II. Sylvester recommends, however, that players adopt a spirit of *mai pen rai*, a common Thai term invoked to mitigate potential conflict; it means "never mind."



Figure 7.20: Woman outside Seven Star, a Bangkok shop that sells products bearing Hitler caricatures.







# Beyond the Game Table



# Revisiting “the City as Game Board”

Dale Leorke and Troy Innocent



Figure 8.1: Barcelona's Poblenou superblock  
reclaims urban spaces for play.



In 2004, the designers and educators Nick Fortugno, Frank Lantz, and Katie Salen Tekinbaş made a citywide game for the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul. Their project, *Big Urban Game (B.U.G.)*, aimed to transform the cities into what Lantz called “the world’s largest board game.” Three teams competed in a five-day race through the city. Each team carried a twenty-five-foot-tall pawn and followed a separate path through the city chosen in advance by residents, while a daily dice roll decided which team got a head start. *B.U.G.* is one of the first outdoor urban game projects that popularized the concept of the “city as game board.”

This metaphor emerged in the 1990s with the rise of ARGs (alternate reality games) like *Perplex City* that required participants to search online *and* in physical locations for clues to solve a mystery. But it became even more widespread throughout the early 2000s as artists, academics, and game designers experimented with GPS and mobile, location-aware devices to incorporate the player’s physical location or actions into digital games. They built on other practices like geocaching, street games, and other play in public space, attracting thousands of players worldwide.

Cities are complex, messy spaces layered with codes and signs governing movement and behavior. Game design takes the complexity of place and simplifies it through an abstraction, making it playable. When these two realms—urban space and game design—intersect, they can defamiliarize the familiar and make visible or even reconfigure the rules of the city. Seeing the city from

Figure 8.2: The *B.U.G.* pawn.



the perspective of a pawn with rules governing its movement reveals affordances and limitations of urban design that would usually be hidden or subconscious. Meanwhile, cities designed on grids read like game boards from above, making it easy to remap them for play, as *PacManhattan* (2003) perfectly illustrates. Board game mechanics appear in the design of other mixed-reality games by asking people to move through checkpoints, collect objects at locations, and compete with one another in navigating urban space.

American-style board games use simple mechanics, such as the luck of the dice roll, while Euro-style board games incorporate strategies built around cards and resources. Approaching the city as game board in mixed-reality games is similarly variable. In *Wayfinder Live* (2016), a stylized abstraction of the city is broken into sixteen collectible puzzle pieces. It simultaneously serves as a map referencing clues to real-world locations, a scoreboard that shows what the player has collected so far, and an interface for influencing the current collective state of play in the game. In comparison, the game board on Main Street in *Welcome to Lillydale* is static, using *Carcassonne*-style tile construction to create a map that can be walked—or jumped on—in moments of unstructured, physical play. Both are readable as abstractions of urban space that blend recognizable features of urban environments and board game design.

Crucially, the “city as game board” metaphor can have both positive and negative connotations. It can be empowering and transformative, reinscribing everyday places with ludic qualities. But it can also overwrite our lived experience of cities and erase their complexity, appropriating their objects and inhabitants as commodities within the game world. They might become, to paraphrase the artist and academic Mary Flanagan, an “entertainment spectacle” for a privileged audience.<sup>1</sup> Flanagan reminds us that games played in public spaces do not unfold in a void but are connected to the lived environment. There is no point in designing a game for public space that ignores the struggles, inequalities, and marginalization faced by its inhabitants; you might as well design a board game instead. This can remove us from one of the main reasons for situating

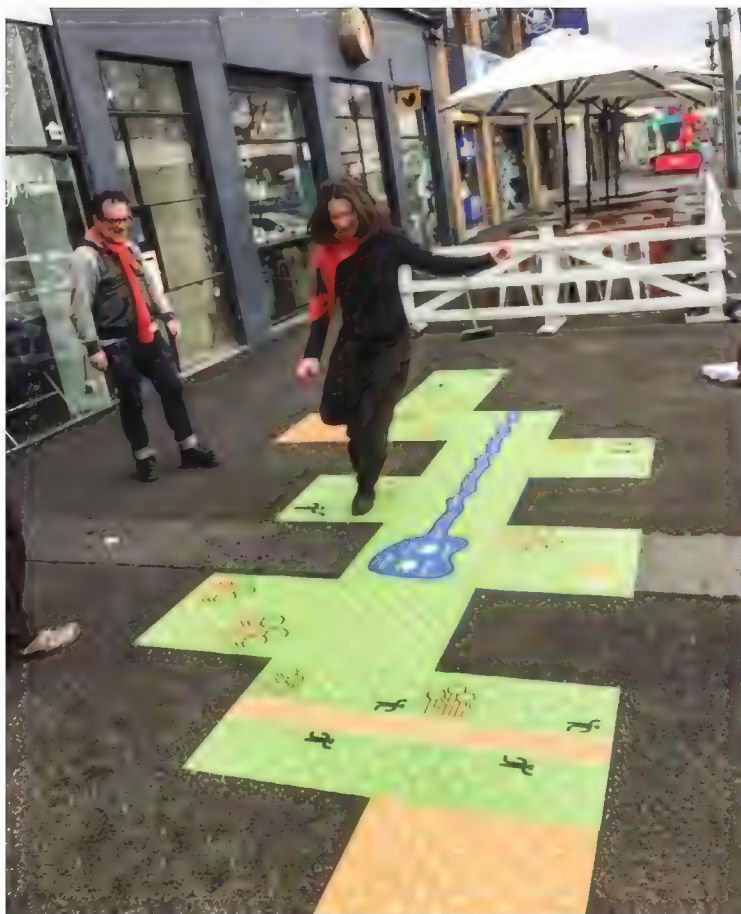


Figure 8.3: *Welcome to Lillydale* street game.

urban play in cities: the rich, complex, ready-made worlds they represent to both players and designers.

"Smart cities" has become an increasingly popular catchphrase for a technology-driven approach to urban planning. But they also embody this uncritical approach to the city as game board. The "urban dashboard" is a computer interface for urban governance systems modeled on a *SimCity*-like god's-eye view of real urban spaces reduced to the abstraction of data. They are often sold with a narrative depicting the mayor controlling the city from afar, making critical decisions with a few taps on the screen. Unlike the designers of mixed-reality games who situate experiences in the materiality of the street, the smart city dashboard remains at a distance—an abstraction that is difficult to differentiate from the *SimCity* simulation that it draws on. It can be read and experienced as "just a game" when it is governing decisions that have real impacts on actual people and places.

In addition to drawing on the design and aesthetics of board games, mixed-reality game designers also invoke earlier avant-garde artistic groups and practices like the Situationist International (SI). The SI was a collective of twentieth-century artists, activists, and theorists who were opposed to authoritarian abstractions of the world, seeing the entire world as an ongoing game and entertainment spectacles as a distraction from lived experience. They would likely have considered the smart city dashboard another expression of the uneven distribution of power in the modern city. The SI also created a two-player tabletop wargame in which lines of communication are equally important as firepower. Produced as a philosophical tool for understanding the world, a way of understanding and learning about conflict, the game was informed by its creators' own complex experiences of the world.

As an abstraction, the city as game board represents a way for both urban planners and game designers to position citizens within the multiplicity of rules and codes in cities and begin to engage with urban place. It is a way to challenge and contest these rules and codes by confronting their complexity. Once situated, citizens' experiences should take a speculative and imaginative turn as they become part of the processes that contest and challenge urban space. Their play responds to and is embedded in daily life, because to remain completely within the abstraction of the game board is to erase or delegitimize the diversity of lived experience.



# Workshopping Board Games for Space, Place, and Culture

Erik Champion and Juan Hiriart



Figure 8.4: Codesign of Digitally Mediated Experiences at a workshop conducted at the University of York in 2019.

Conveying built heritage values and historical knowledge through board game design may seem an odd decision. Communicating space, place, and culture through play is challenge enough for a medium inherently incapable of evoking the direct experience of inhabitation and of architecture as a spatial art. Board games are engaging, social, quick to make, and fast to learn, intuitive or nuanced. From the complex to the spontaneous, board games can be effective, visceral tools for cultural immersion, challenging cultural assumptions and preconceptions, encouraging discussion and collaboration between players, and provoking insight and enjoyment with simple props or intricate rules. Our experience hosting participative design workshops with historians, archaeologists, and heritage professionals has provided insights into how board games may contribute to efforts to instill heritage values among various contexts and audiences. In small groups of three to four people, participants determine the design decisions, discussing and solving problems that often arise in an iterative process where historical research, game design, and play testing both blend and butt heads.

Participants define the game's core subject and theme, identifying "the cultural, historical, or archaeological facts and interpretations of the site or model that are significant, hidden or otherwise appropriate, engaging or transformative to explore."<sup>1</sup> We provided the minimum scaffolding necessary for sparking ideas without imposing our own views, while noting that the creation of engaging play environments requires an underlying structure. Without this structure, participants risk replicating existing game genres with repetitive mechanics, fail to incorporate increasing complexity and challenges, or become frustrated with the task of communicating historical information or heritage appreciation. Shallow imitation may result in both a bad learning experience and an unengaging game.

The schematic in figure 8.5 explains the design components of history and heritage-based games. It emphasizes focusing on the specific cultural significance and specific type of knowledge learned, ensuring that mechanics change game states at meaningful points of the gameplay, and providing an increasingly challenging reward system to prevent eventual boredom. Varying affordances and constraints also help ensure that challenges are dynamic and engaging.

For example, in a two-day workshop at the University of York (UK), a team of archaeologists, academics, and heritage professionals developed a board game prototype set in early medieval Britain. The design goals were to communicate how people inhabited the landscape, and the challenges of everyday life, based on existing data from the archaeological site of West Stow in Suffolk. The game needed to convey historical as well as cultural information about the period but also be engaging and fun. The historical board game challenged players to make a living from the land, facing typical problems that medieval farmers had to solve in the village of West Stow.

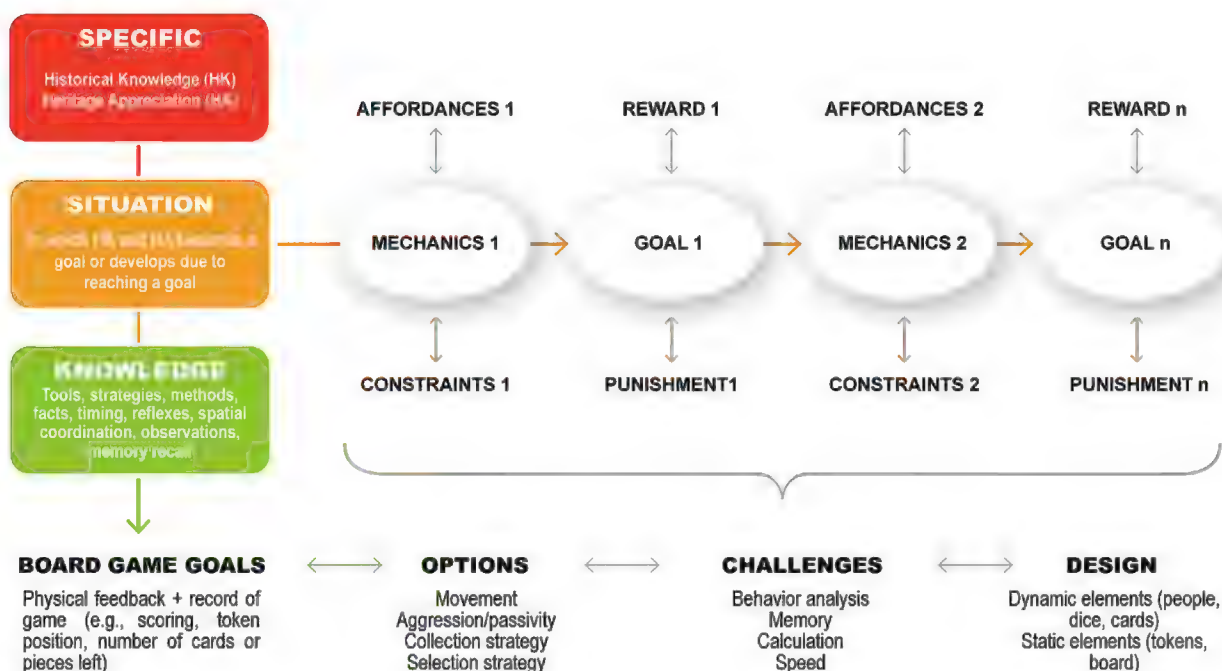


Figure 8.5: Game design schema for history and heritage-related games.

To determine the game subject, a simple card-sorting exercise defining “substantive concepts” helps minimize the risk that participants “rush” into a discussion of game mechanics without clearly understanding links between goals, gameplay, and rewards.<sup>2</sup> For this game, players drew rough sketches on rectangular pieces of cardboard; a modular board represented the terrain and quickly set available resources. Core game mechanics were defined by quantitative systems determining the rules and boundaries for the players’ actions and specific challenges.

The resulting representation communicated spatial ideas reasonably well but did not fully evoke a sense of place. A sense of inhabitation could only be achieved by turning players into dwellers on the board, leveraging the game resources to endure the harsh conditions of medieval Britain.

Taking turns, each player had to decide the best strategy to survive through scarcity: where to build a house, when to plant crops, how much food to save for winter. In this way, the acts of moving around and adding or removing tokens from the board symbolically communicated spatial relationships as well as the logics of production and reproduction from everyday life. Representative tasks such as foraging, threshing grain, and plowing the land were added to the player’s repertoire, and their successful outcome was conditioned by strategy





Figure 8.6: The 2020 Space, Place, People and Culture Symposium held at Curtin University in Perth, Australia.

and timing as well as by pure chance (sometimes stuff just goes wrong). Testing sessions prompted interesting debates among participants. They declared the primary focus on survival mechanics was problematic. The social complexity and deeply religious beliefs of early medieval life were often in conflict with individual survival.

Instead of oversimplified distinctions between right and wrong, facilitating players' decisions and interactions prompt interesting dilemmas and questions. Figure 8.6 shows a game prototype designed to expose

the evils of colonialism that risked anchoring the mechanics of colonialism in the gameplay but led to fascinating debates on how colonialism could, should, or should not factor in game design.

How can literary descriptions of the past be "blocked" onto physical (or digital) game elements, and the varying accuracy of historical information be converted to the transactional and rule-based essence of gameplay? Could an appreciation and awareness of heritage (its value, uniqueness, formation, impact, and engagement by society) be conveyed via games? Heritage is not just the what, but also the how: how it is preserved and communicated from generation to generation. And the ways in which games can convey historical processes (the how) are typically through metonymical representation rather than through ritual immersion or contextually situated role playing. Perhaps the highest historical value of this sort of engagement resides not so much in the accurate replication and reenactment of modeled historical experiences but in the reflections and rich debates that games trigger.

# Tables and Floors

## The Playscapes of Board Games

Chad Randl



Figure 8.7: Playing *Hive* underwater.

Games can be played wherever there is a place, the objects necessary—a surface, pebbles or buttons for tokens, pig knuckles for dice—and moments of otherwise idle time. The Antonia Fortress in Jerusalem still bears the marks of game boards Roman soldiers carved into its stones more than two millennia ago. In 2018 archaeologists discovered medieval bricks with a game board scratched into their clay surface at Vyborg Castle in Russia.<sup>1</sup> Maile Hutterer describes similar artifacts found at Chester Cathedral in her essay in this volume. From concrete city park tables to board game cafés, from carpeted floors to the bottom of swimming pools, people make spaces of escape into the world of play.

Games like *Hive* (2000) lend themselves to play in varied locales. Its twenty-two Bakelite tiles are small and durable; their placement requires no board, any

relatively flat surface will do. According to photos on BoardGameGeek, the game has been played on beaches in Cuba and Sardinia, on hiking trails in British Columbia and the Swiss Alps, overlooking the pyramids at Giza, in a maternity ward, and in the Brazilian rain forest. Travel versions of chess, *Scrabble*, and *Battleship*, with magnetic boards and pieces, make them easy to take along on trips.

Associations with free time, escapism, and place bind board games and vacation together. Albert Lamorisse purportedly invented *Risk* while on a vacation in Holland. Roberto Bolaño's 2011 novel *The Third Reich* takes place on holiday in Spain.<sup>2</sup> The main character spends the trip obsessing over a wargame in a darkened hotel room while his girlfriend goes to the beach. Fans of the now-classic 2000 Eurogame *Carcassonne* have visited (or at least made side excursions) to the game's namesake historic town in southern France, several posting images online of games under way within view of Carcassonne's medieval walls and towers.

Manufacturers in the past emphasized a distinction between their products and less respectable games by situating the former within the domestic interior. Board games facilitated wholesome family togetherness; they involved no risk of moral corruption or financial ruin. In 1945, George Parker noted that "Parker Brothers' games are played on living room tables, on card tables or in front of fireplaces with the players comfortably hunkered down on hearthrugs. Most decidedly they are not the ones played along the midways at carnivals or the cubicles bordering the boardwalks at Coney Island."<sup>3</sup>



Figure 8.8: Playing *Carcassonne* in Carcassonne, France, in 2007.



With a growing embrace of casual living in the post-World War II era, wall-to-wall carpet substituted for hearthrugs and floors became more common surfaces for adult socializing. Acknowledging these trends, in 1966 Milton Bradley released *Twister*, a game in which the “action mat” functioned as board and players’ bodies were the pieces. It was the first in a genre of games encouraging physical interaction and the transgression of personal boundaries.<sup>4</sup> Retailers were uncomfortable with *Twister*’s provocative character, and critics derided it as “sex in a box.” Only after Johnny Carson and his guest Eva Gabor played a round on *The Tonight Show* did sales explode, pushing the game toward the classic status it still enjoys today.<sup>5</sup> *Twister*, and games like it, promoted a messy and intertwined sense of space at a time when Americans were rethinking established norms of personal interaction (sanctioning cheek-to-cheek dancing and teen petting, for example). By the late 1960s, more saucy adult games (*Bumps and Grinds*, 1967; *Adultery*, 1969; *Xaviera’s*



Figure 8.9: Two boys play the Scrabble-like math game *Thirteen* on a carpeted floor.



Figure 8.10: Photo by iconic photographer Bunny Yeager of mid-1960s *Twister* game.

*Game*, 1974) that centered on drinking, stripping, and sexual exploration were available by mail order and in specialty stores. Advertisements and box art often depicted these games under way by candlelight on shag and bearskin rugs.<sup>6</sup>

The homes of fervent gamers may feature spaces given over entirely to play. Interwar “rumpus rooms” and postwar “recreation rooms” were prototypes. Contemporary game rooms or “game caves” profiled on BoardGameGeek show walls of game boxes, (often custom-built) gaming tables, and snack bars and fridges to provision long play sessions. The industrial designer Norman Bel Geddes was an early and extreme devotee of the dedicated play space. In the 1920s and ‘30s, he developed a series of increasingly elaborate games starting with large-scale tabletop sport games, including a nine-hole golf course. When his family moved to a more spacious Manhattan brownstone, he designed and built the “Nutshell Jockey Club,” a twenty-eight-foot-long mechanical horse-racing track that took up his entire basement. The most elaborate was “War Game,” played on an eighty-square-foot table with 3D topography contested by two teams’ armies represented by pushpins. As a biographer of Bel Geddes notes, the games, with their miniaturized detail, vast scale, and efforts toward realism, provided a sort of prototype for the designer’s most famous project, the enormous General Motors Futurama exhibition at the 1939–1940 World’s Fair in New York.<sup>7</sup> For Bel Geddes, whose studio and home were under the same roof, play worlds and professional worlds blended into one.

# Gaming Negotiations

## Creating Community and Democratic Space

Quilian Riano



Figure 8.11: Playing "A Shared Plaza"  
with North Corona community members  
in Queens, New York.



Among the major political issues under debate today in the United States is political subjectivity: whom do regulatory and government systems respond to? As first drafted, the US Constitution gave political agency only to property-owning white men. Expanding claims to power by increasingly diverse communities have been contested since at least the Reconstruction era. These still-unresolved issues often play out in public spaces.

The political theorist Chantal Mouffe sees the role of public space as a “battle-ground where different hegemonic projects are confronted, without any possibility of final reconciliation.”<sup>1</sup> Mouffe’s work reveals the paradoxes in our political system: who makes up the *dēmos*, or people, in our system, and who is left out? It also proposes radical pluralistic processes that acknowledge, celebrate, and productively use conflict as a way of creating a new democratic space. My practice explores how to use this kind of agonistic negotiation to turn both community engagement and final design outcomes (landscapes, architectures, infrastructures) into games. Not games that any one individual is meant to win or lose, but rather games that are meant to elicit conversation, agency, and negotiated change.

One such project was in North Corona, Queens, known as one of the most diverse neighborhoods in the nation and a place where democratic systems are actively being rethought. Although the background of residents varies from block to block and includes a large South Asian community, Little Colombia, and Dominican and Mexican communities, the neighborhood is known to come together for political activism and action.<sup>2</sup> In 2017, for example, it defeated a proposed business improvement district that many feared would lessen opportunity for area immigrants.<sup>3</sup>

When a new plaza was proposed for North Corona, the Queens Museum of Art commissioned me to do an engagement project meant to create conversations about public space, displacement, and other issues in this pluralistic community. The process culminated in “A Shared Plaza,” a game that consisted of fifteen 40-by-48-inch large-scale game pieces, for five topics that had been identified through community discussions: community programming, economic opportunities, social services, green services, and local economy. To play the game, community members moved the pieces on the twelve-square playing board, responding to prompts by me and my team, acting as facilitators. The game exposed fears of gentrification, displacement, and stop-and-frisk (the plaza had the highest incidence of these police encounters for Latin men).

Frank conversations led to two specific outcomes. First, we used the game’s different configurations to create programming notes that we provided to the museum as it advocated for the community within the larger government-sponsored plaza renovation. Perhaps more importantly, a long-term group emerged that would continue to have conversations, marked by productive

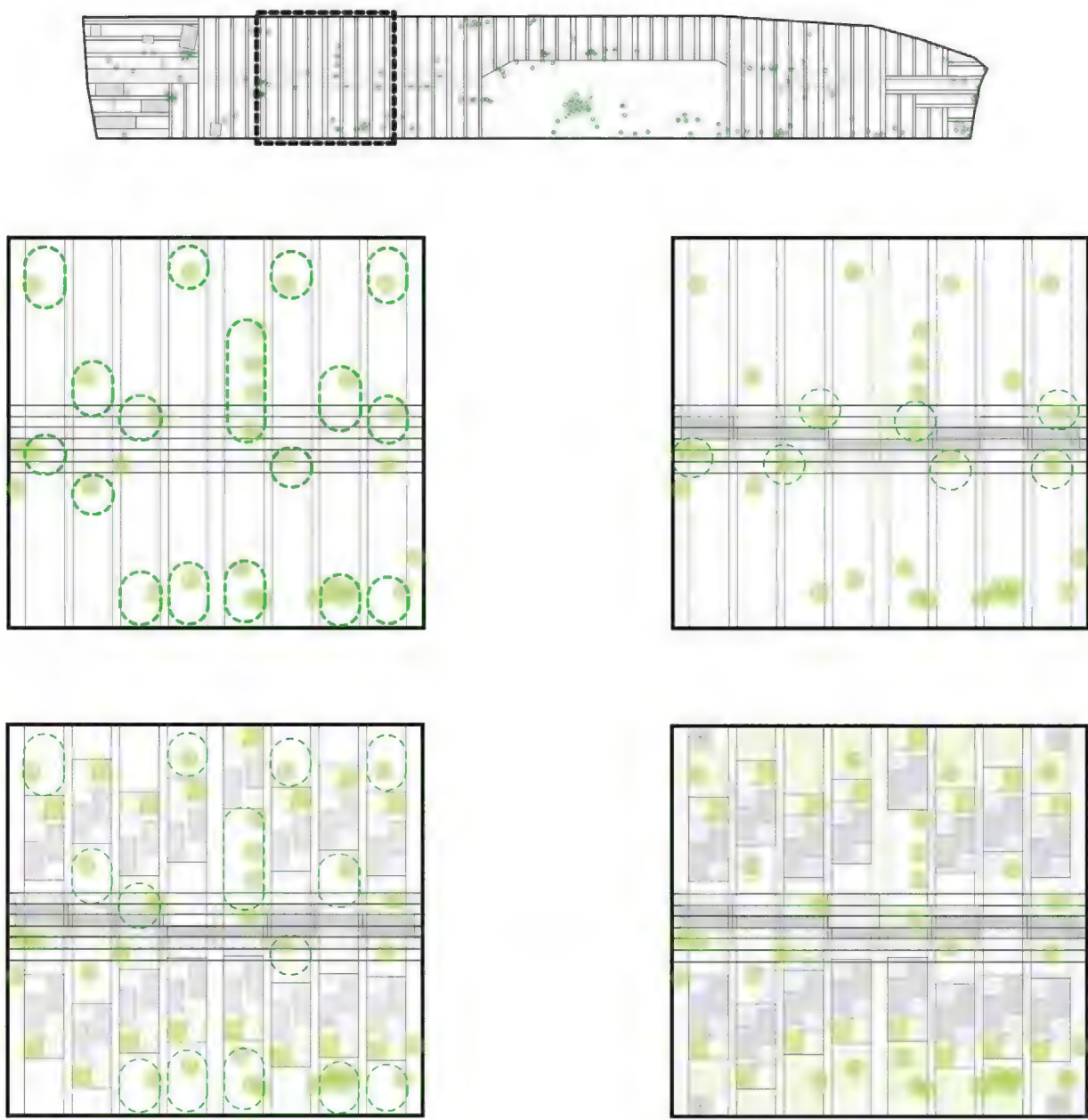


Figure 8.12: Casas de la Esperanza 2  
"Gamefied" Urban Design Diagram for  
housing complex in Granada, Nicaragua.

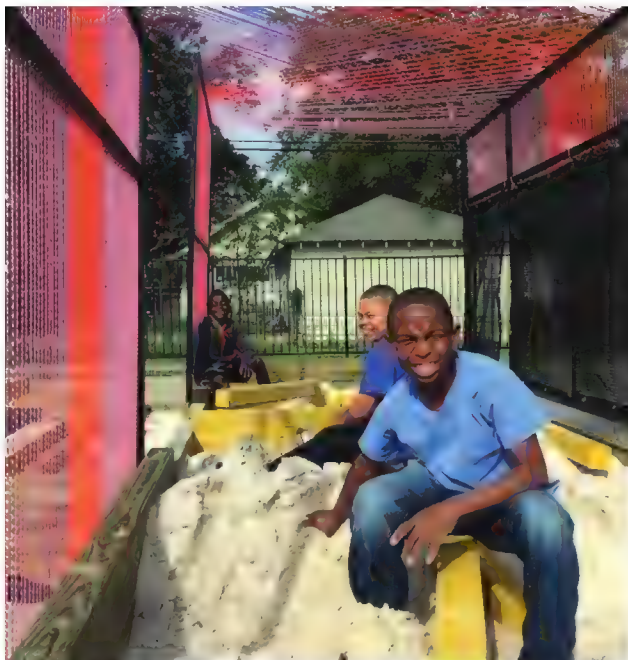


Figure 8.13: SANDBOXING game at Jubilee Park in Dallas, Texas.

conflicts, about the state and future of public spaces in the neighborhood and to advocate for change.<sup>4</sup>

My work also explores how games can be the design of new spaces in itself. A housing project I worked on in Granada, Nicaragua, with Estudio Teddy Cruz and landscape architect Simon Busiere provides one example. The project was for a new complex of eighty homes for a community-based nonprofit. When the team could not get an accurate plan showing the area's trees and other landscape features, we saw this potential drawback as a moment to create a gamified structure to the complex that went beyond the typical static master plan. Inspired by Sol LeWitt's artworks made from a set of instructions, the plan lays out a set of basic principles, relationships, and processes that give the people and families building the houses as much agency as possible while saving natural resources such as trees. The goal was to meet basic community

needs (utilities, sewage, circulation) while providing opportunities both for individual choice and for collective negotiation and action—for example, providing incentives for different families to work together to increase farming land.

Another "design as game" is the SANDBOXING pavilion developed for the New Cities, Future Ruins arts initiative in Dallas, Texas, which met to discuss the potential future of Sunbelt cities. The game asked participants (often children and other young people) to playfully negotiate two key resources for the future of the southwestern city: land (sand) and water. The pavilion, installed in Old East Dallas's Jubilee Park, was made up of a sandbox designed to change as players negotiate space and a structural dew-catcher canopy—a passive system used in arid climates to extract water particles from the atmosphere. Without any outcome being prescribed, players chose to share collectively or further restrict access to ever-diminishing resources. The game was meant to prompt thought, conversation, and even negotiation about natural resources, and how to apportion them, without being overly didactic.

These projects demonstrate how collaborative games can help to shape space, facilitate negotiation, and flexibly envision change. When community processes are treated as cooperative games, conversations can be rehearsed, and ideas piloted in a low-stakes environment. This process can shift the role of the designer from sole shaper into facilitator of that shaping, actively encouraging and accommodating a more pluralistic *demos* to reimagine urban environments.



# Conclusion



Figure 9.1: Game board for *Tammany Hall*.

The games and issues that *Playing Place* contributors explore are entwined in ways belied by their neat arrangement in the table of contents. As a collection, the essay' suggest some common considerations. First is the issue of player positionality. Board games often present their settings, whether house plans or the entire globe, from a top-down perspective. The player's viewpoint seems godlike, authoritative, and often all-seeing and all-knowing. Observing the miniature world depicted in a board game from above can evoke the same wonder as dollhouses, model railroads, Lego sets, and architectural scale models. Game boards featuring plans and top-down views allow players to look through walls and over hills, to see all corners of the city at once, to know the location of every token. Whether it's a mountain side, the interior layout of a mansion crime scene, or an 1833 map of lower Manhattan (reproduced as the game board for the 2007 game *Tammany Hall*), the play space of the tabletop game seems all-revealing and the players all-powerful. According to communications scholar Mark J. P. Wolf, "This sense of visual mastery, taking in the whole landscape in a single view, yet from a position by which the smallest of details can be appreciated, is part of the pleasure" of scaled-down model worlds.<sup>1</sup> Academics have developed a rich literature interpreting how totalizing visual frameworks like the aerial view carry embedded assumptions of a modern(ist) ability to control, dominate, universalize, and reduce complex conditions.<sup>2</sup>

But other affordances of board games—concealing information (with card hands and decks, or hidden money, strength, and victory points), integrating chance (through dice or other mechanisms)—limit player omnipotence and omnipresence. Unless a game is played solitaire, there are opponents vying to advance their place on the board and constrain others'. The repositioning of tokens remakes the game state from turn to turn. The player's view of the game board, combined with the experience of activating board and components through play, may be more akin to the open nature of bird's-eye city views first developed in the Renaissance. These oblique-angle aerial depictions were creative acts of imaginary cartography in which, as Giuliana Bruno notes, "there is no clear focal point"; rather, the view is "constructed as a montage of different vanishing points. The observer is not fixed to a position or to a set distance but appears free to wander in and around the space." Furthering playful associations, Bruno sees the bird's-eye view as a "permeable place of encounters between the map and the landscape, where a number of (im)possible itineraries were inscribed."<sup>3</sup> Close-ups of these representations, which were a popular means of civic boosterism in the late-nineteenth-century United States, show game-token-like buildings crowding a board-like landscape and roadways, waterways, and railroad tracks dividing cities into grids of lots that look like spaces on a game board. Indeed, after writing the previous paragraph, we came across a game from 1884 called *The Road to Washington* with a board depicting cities and buildings in oblique aerial views undoubtedly informed by bird's-eye views.



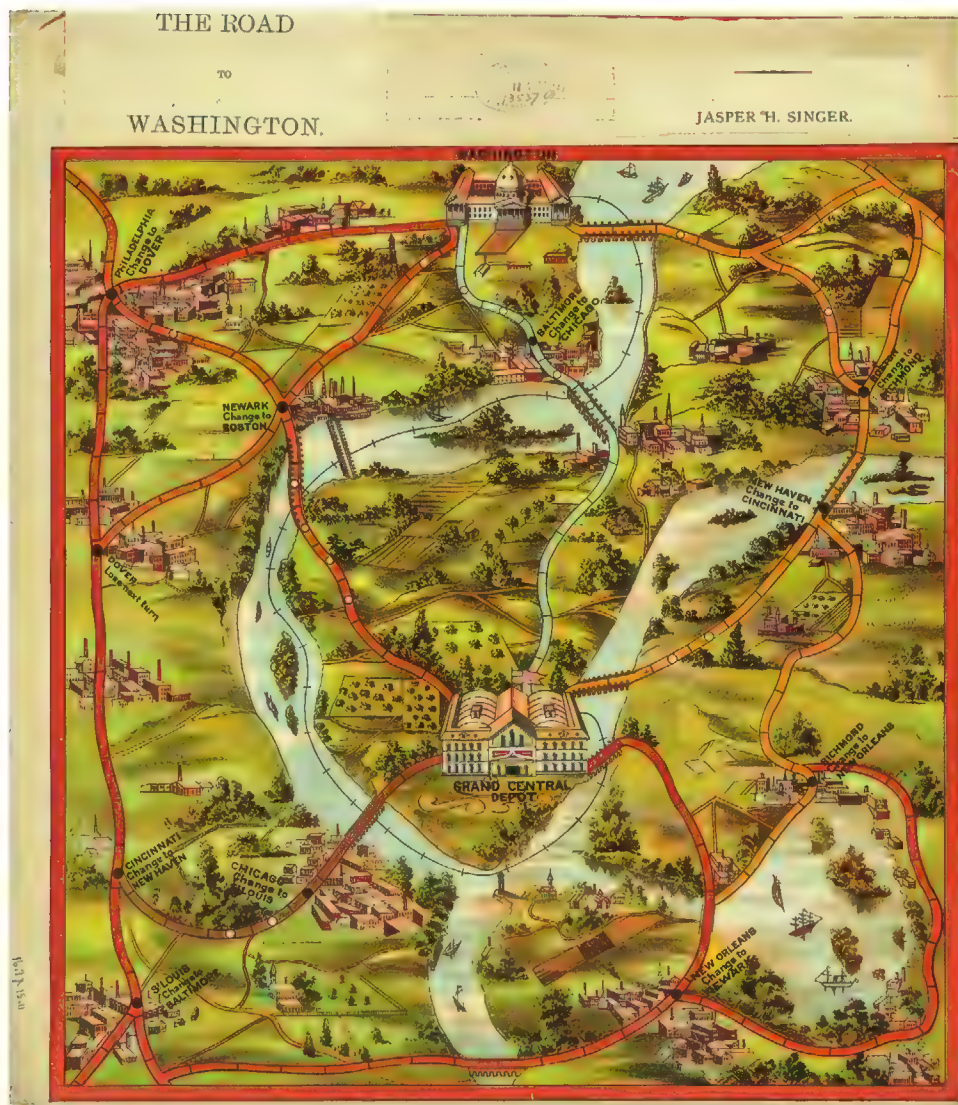
Figure 9.2: Bird's-eye view of Mystic River and Mystic Bridge, Connecticut, from 1879.

The contingent nature of board games—their emergent and variable narratives and especially their desire to represent the real world (or even simulate it) while simplifying and abstracting it—makes them so fun to study, both as forms of play and as reflections of the meanings humans ascribe to that world. Numerous essays in *Playing Place* recognize the tension in board games between a desire to depict a place and a desire to entertain and attract consumers. As we mention in the introduction, games often boil down complex situations to playable (and marketable) representations. Even the most elaborate board games are simplifications, and even the most faithful simulation will fail at fully depicting the breadth of real-life events and circumstances. In a well-known aphorism, the statistician George Box claimed that “all models are wrong, but some are useful.”<sup>4</sup> Games that model architecture, places, and spatial configurations are useful in revealing what they (and their designers, marketers, and ultimately their consumers and players) consider important and what they leave out—what is central to the model and what is extraneous.

Game board depictions are curated and abstracted to shape and facilitate play and enable particular narratives. In many of the games covered here, pathways and points on the board lend added importance to some locales, while the spaces in between are diminished or erased entirely. Such a reductive approach in digital networks has been critiqued by Ulises Mejias as “nodocentric,” “a belief that only nodes are real and only nodes deserve to be explained,” implying that “to be anything other than a node is to be invisible, nonexistent.”<sup>5</sup> How new games and mechanics may elevate the visibility of systemic racism, economic marginalization, and struggles for spatial justice, complicating narratives (while maintaining their commercial appeal) will remain an ongoing challenge for future game designers.



Figure 9.3: Game board for *The Road to Washington*, designed by Jasper Singer in 1884.



## Convergences and Correctives

The growing popularity of board games in the twenty-first century suggests that screen fatigue and the desire for “digital detox” are real. As we note in the introduction, such tendencies have only been amplified by the pandemic, when family members or roommates in “social bubbles” found board games an ideal means to pass the time in isolation. In mid-2022, as the pandemic seemed to recede in Europe and the Americas, explanations for the popularity of board games shifted from a desire to cocoon together in safety to a desire to once again commune in person and share physical spaces and experiences.<sup>6</sup>

Many predicted that the rise of personal computers in the 1980s would mean the demise of slower-paced analog games, that digital play would consign board games permanently to the backs of closets. But as many of the essays here attest, the subsequent decade saw a board game revival that continues to the present day. Yet the divide between board games and digital games has always been a permeable one. At the dawn of the home computer and video game era, board game companies sought to meld the two, to take advantage of the new cultural cachet enjoyed by all things electronic, and to provide variability and atmosphere (through lights and sound effects). Milton Bradley's 1981 fantasy role-playing game *The Dark Tower* was one of the first, featuring a 1.5-foot-tall tower in the center of the game board housing a microprocessor that regulated movement and resolved actions.<sup>7</sup> The insertion of computerized elements into the board game space, whether in *The Dark Tower*, *Electronic Mall Madness*, or more recent retro revivals like *Return to Dark Tower* (2022), demonstrates a desire to stay relevant and the proven marketability of the gimmick.

Today computers and board games converge on websites and web, phone, and tablet apps that offer platforms for people in disparate locations to play digital representations of physical board games. A perennial challenge of the board game aficionado is finding opponents with equivalent eagerness and availability. While playing by mail with distant opponents was an early (albeit incredibly slow) means to play remotely, the ubiquity of internet-connected devices has made such opportunities much more available.<sup>8</sup> Numerous websites and digital platforms (Board Game Arena, Tabletopia, BrettspielWelt, VASSAL) enable online play of board games. Often, digital versions feature animated tumbling dice and the clicking sound of tokens set down on virtual boards suggesting that these sensory elements are essential parts of a board game's appeal. Designers for *Tabletop Simulator* on the Steam game platform go so far as to re-create three-dimensional environments, from idealized gardens to gamer caves, in which disembodied players sit at 3D tables manipulating 3D board game components.

Board games have received much less attention from scholars than computer games—perhaps understandably, since the mobile, PC, and console game industry's value recently surpassed that of global film and music markets combined.<sup>9</sup> Yet they share overlapping characteristics that enable some sharing of interpretive approaches. Both have systems and internal logics; both are seen as frivolous and even childish (yet are predominantly consumed by adults). Both



Figure 9.4: Toy store advertisement for Milton Bradley's 1981 game *The Dark Tower*.



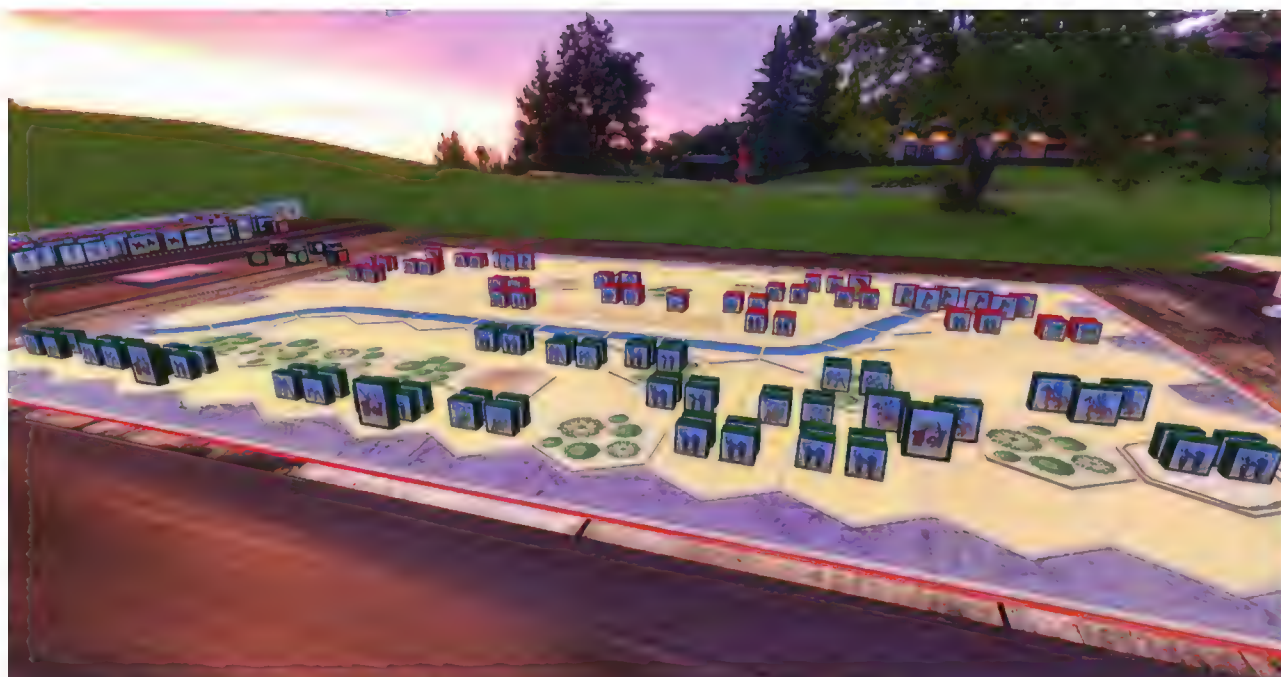


Figure 9.5: A game of *Commands and Colors: Ancients* set in a 3D field on Steam's Tabletop Simulator digital platform.

can draw from a long trail of ludic scholarship and theorizing about the nature and meaning of play that predates them. And both involve physical components and interfaces: computer games have screens, peripherals, controllers, and keyboards; board games have the playing surface, the meeples and tokens (top hats and terriers, wrenches and rope) of plastic, metal, or wood, and the rule books and boxes that together constitute an enclosed immersive system.<sup>10</sup> Ultimately, they are both gaming machines designed to provide emergent narratives.

The convergence of digital games and board games prompts consideration of where games and the physical world intersect. Slippage is most evident when the representational routes on game boards morph into concrete city streets and tokens turn into real people with local concerns, priorities, and preferences.<sup>11</sup> Persistent games that use virtual reality and augmented reality technologies enable entire cities to function as game boards. Essays in the book's final chapter insinuate board game models directly into real places. Games encouraging participatory design and planning practices and social engagement with the built environment offer an emancipatory potential that is typically only latent in other board game models. But the potential is there, partly because, as noted in the introduction, games are considered engaging *and* unimportant.<sup>12</sup>

Our contributors identify how tabletop games have long provided a space where normative ideals of power, domination, colonialism, and the exotic other were perpetuated, if not celebrated.<sup>13</sup> In 2019, GMT Games called off release of a game, *Scramble for Africa*, in response to criticisms about the game's



depiction of colonialism. A new generation of board game designs are beginning to grapple with complicated subjects and contested place-based histories and to move beyond the caricatures of marginalized and non-Western communities common in board games to date.<sup>14</sup>

While we were drafting this conclusion, GMT announced the development of a new game, *Borikén: The Taíno Resistance*, by Julio E. Nazario. The game enables players to revisit how Taíno people struggled against the occupation of their island (present-day Puerto Rico) by Spanish conquistadores in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The game seems a direct counter to the 2004 game *Puerto Rico*, one of the most popular Euro board games of all time, and one that depicts the colonization of Borikén while entirely erasing the Taíno presence.<sup>15</sup> Nazario's game and others like it are beginning to embrace what Edward Soja called "Third Space," a "lived space of radical openness and unlimited scope, where all histories and geographies, all times and places, are immanently presented and represented, a strategic space of power and domination, empowerment and resistance."<sup>16</sup>

Depending on who is counting, between 3,500 to 4,500 new board games and expansions are released globally each year.<sup>17</sup> As new games appear and old games are rediscovered, the ideas raised in *Playing Place* will find fresh purchase. The collection's essays confirm that there is a much greater variety of board games and issues than a focus on the staples like *Monopoly* might suggest. These essays are intended to serve as a stepping-off point. If, because of their brevity, they leave readers wanting to know more (or to research or write more) about a subject, that is a good thing. The essays are proposals for future scholars and gamers to continue conversations exploring popular encounters with design, place making on the tabletop and in the built environment, and a more contingent, and even playful, approach to scholarship. In his "Manifesto for a Ludic Century," Eric Zimmerman argues for the broader potential of play. The complexities and interrelatedness of contemporary problems, according to Zimmerman, "require playful, innovative, transdisciplinary thinking in which systems can be analyzed, redesigned, and transformed into something new."<sup>18</sup> Intellectuals and cultural critics have historically viewed play and games with suspicion—as distractions from serious work, rigorous thought, and engagement with real issues.<sup>19</sup> As our world becomes more gamified, and as game-influenced emergent forms of storytelling grow in importance, it is imperative that we continue to develop the kinds of gaming literacy that Zimmerman proposes, to better understand the history of how place was played and how we may play it better in the future.



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# Notes

## Introduction

1 Milton Bradley's epigraph comes from "Games and Amusements," *Good Housekeeping* 22, no. 1 (1896): 14.

2 Regarding short-form essays, our format was influenced by the website *Platform* ([www.platformspace.net](http://www.platformspace.net)), which confirms that provocative and scholarly questions can be addressed in 1,000 words often as well as in 10,000 words.

3 "Rich's Wonderful World of Toys: Perfect Blend of Elegance and Self-Service," *Toy and Hobby World* 4, no. 22 (November 21, 1966): 23.

4 "Games: Past Go and Accelerating," *Toys and Novelties*, July 1970, 38–44.

5 Jonathan Kay, "The Invasion of the German Board Games," *The Atlantic*, January 21, 2018, accessed August 24, 2021, <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2018/01/german-board-games-catan/550826/>. See also Stewart Woods, *Eurogames: The Design, Culture and Play of Modern European Board Games* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012).

6 Alexis Soloski, "Trapped at Home? Board Game On!" *New York Times*, April 30, 2020, accessed September 8, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/30/arts/board-games-soothing-virus.html>; Stu Woo and Denise Roland, "How Do Doctors Treating Coronavirus Relax? By Playing the Game 'Pandemic,'" *Wall Street Journal*, June 28, 2020, accessed September 6, 2021, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-do-doctors-treating-coronavirus-relax-by-playing-the-game-pandemic-11593369385>.

7 See, e.g., essays in Wiebe E. Bijker, Thomas P. Hughes, and Trevor J. Pinch, eds., *The Social Construction of Technological Systems: New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987).

8 The board game classifications used here are not all-encompassing, universally understood, or as clear-cut as their descriptions may suggest, but they help make sense of an otherwise overwhelming range of board game forms. Numerous other types and categories (party, Ameritrash, worker placement) are folded into the three outlined earlier. The terms and descriptions for "staple" and "promotional" games come from "Games: Past Go and Accelerating," *Toys and Novelties*, July 1970, 38–44.

9 Because of their popularity, they are also the most common subjects of mass-market books. See the works by Phil Orbanes, Mary Pilon, Tristan Donovan, and others in the bibliography.

10 Woods, *Eurogames*, 117.

11 Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (London: Maurice Temple Smith, 1970). For debates about the existence and nature of the Magic Circle, see Mia Consalvo, "There Is No Magic Circle," *Games and Culture* 4, no. 4 (2009): 408–417; Jaakko Stenros, "In Defense of a Magic Circle: The Social, Mental and Cultural Boundaries of Play," *Transactions of the Digital Games Research Association* 1, no. 2 (2014): 147–185;



and Joshua Daniel-Wariya, "Rhetorical Strategy and Creative Methodology: Revisiting *Homo Ludens*," *Games and Culture* 14, no. 6 (2019): 622–638.

12 Alex Lehnerer, *Grand Urban Rules* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2009), 6.

13 Dolores Hayden calls place "one of the trickiest words in the human language, a suitcase so overfilled one can never shut the lid." Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 15.

14 Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 54.

15 Jonathan Sime has written that place is an especially useful concept to bridge disciplinary boundaries and bring both people and the physical environment more prominently into focus. Arguing that architects focus too much on form while diminishing human factors, and environmental psychologists focus too much on human factors without considering form, Sime says, "It is this imbalance in emphasis and a gap in knowledge between subject domains which the concept of 'place' can hopefully help to redress." Jonathan D. Sime, "Creating Places or Designing Spaces?" *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 6 (1986): 50.

16 Garry Crawford, "Is It in the Game? Reconsidering Play Spaces, Game Definitions, Theming, and Sports Videogames," *Games and Culture* 10, no. 6 (2015): 571.

17 Greg Aleknevich, "German Games Are Fraudulent," *Games Journal*, August 2004, accessed September 6, 2021, <http://www.thegamesjournal.com/articles/Fraudulent.shtml>. As designed objects, games are also subject to debate about utility and usability—of component, board layouts, box size, and so on. What some appreciate as enriching "chrome," others consider superfluous, excessive complication. See Shannon Appelcline, "Shannon's List of Do's and Don'ts for Game Component Design," *Gone Gaming*, December 8, 2005, accessed September 6, 2021, [http://boredgamegeeks.blogspot.com/2005/12/shannons-list-of-dos-and-donts-for\\_08.html](http://boredgamegeeks.blogspot.com/2005/12/shannons-list-of-dos-and-donts-for_08.html).

18 Philip Orbanes, "The Board Game Market: A Personal Viewpoint," unpublished manuscript, March 25, 1976, Philip E. Orbanes Papers, Brian Sutton-Smith Library and Archives of Play, the Strong National Museum of Play, box 2, fol. 5, p. 13.

19 Woods, *Eurogames*, 109. The author notes that "although theme might be considered arbitrary in analyzing the behavior of a game system, it is an important element in terms of both marketing and player experience. For a publisher, theme is an important factor in attracting the target audience to purchase a particular title, while for players it functions to draw them into the fictional world of the game and thus enhance the player's experience."

20 Matthew Leacock, email message to Chad Randl, April 2, 2022.

21 The Parker Brothers game, featuring product placements with Westinghouse appliances, bears some similarities to the computer game franchise *The Sims*, introduced in 2000.

22 *Welcome to game box*, Blue Cocker Games, 2018. The "Welcome to" series has since expanded to include *Welcome to New Las Vegas* (2020) and *Welcome to the Moon* (2021).

23 See, e.g., Philip Orbanes, *Monopoly: The World's Most Famous Game—and How It Got That Way* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2006). Magie is the focus of Mary Pilon, *The Monopolists: Obsession, Fury, and the Scandal behind the World's Favorite Board Game* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015); and David Parlett, "Lizzie Magie: America's First Lady of Games," *Board Game Studies Journal* 13, no. 1 (2019): 99–109.

24 Karl Nyren, "Making Your Own Monopoly," *Library Journal* 111, no. 10 (1986): 41. The article noted that such ventures were possible because Parker Brothers' original copyright had expired.

- 25 *Playing Place* contributor Diana Garvin has undertaken research on this game.
- 26 "Monopoly Game Made in the Theresienstadt Ghetto in 1943," Yad Vashem, accessed May 1, 2022, <https://www.yadvashem.org/artifacts/museum/monopol.html>.
- 27 *Acquire* game box, 1971 edition, 3M Corporation, Saint Paul, Minnesota; courtesy of the Strong National Museum of Play, Rochester, New York.
- 28 Bruce Whitehill, *Games: American Boxed Games and Their Makers, 1822–1992* (Radnor, PA: Wallace-Homestead, 1992), 9.
- 29 The original game was set in Buffalo, New York. Other versions included "St. Louis' Great Blizzard" and equivalents for Providence, Boston, Milwaukee, Rochester, Chicago, and possibly others.
- 30 Drawing on recent work in memory studies and using railway-themed games as a model, Jason Begy has written about how games can "objectify" shared memories and how their analysis can reveal the way different media forms and simulations help shape a "subjective cultural understanding of the past, an understanding that is often formed without the supervision of historians." Jason Begy, "Board Games and the Construction of Cultural Memory," *Games and Culture* 12, nos. 7–8 (2015): 718–738.
- 31 The list of lesser-known construction sets that followed these examples is extensive and includes American Plastic Bricks by Elgo, Riviton, and Kenner's Girder and Panel Building Set. Construction and architectural toys have long been a source of interest to architectural historians, especially when they contribute to architectural origin stories like the young Frank Lloyd Wright's formative play with Froebel wood blocks. See, e.g., Robert Vale and Brenda Vale, *Architecture on the Carpet: The Curious Tale of Construction Toys and the Genesis of Modern Buildings* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2013); and Tamar Zinguer, *Architecture in Play: Intimations of Modernism in Architectural Toys* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015).
- 32 Ian Bogost, *How to Do Things with Videogames* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 129.
- 33 Orbanes, "The Board Game Market," 5.
- 34 Bogost, *How to Do Things*, 77.
- 35 Trevor Bender designed the scenario, titled "Virus Crisis." A free e-book edition was offered on the C3i website, accessed September 6, 2021, <https://www.c3iopscenter.com/pages/wargame-room-store/#!/COVID-19-A-Pandemic-Scenario-C3i-eBook-Edition/p/185408244/category=33205167>; link inactive as of November 3, 2022.
- 36 The field of cultural memory studies, established in the 1980s, examines how the past is reconstructed and interpreted in the present by a range of audiences and communities. It is less concerned with fact than with mythologies and the formulation of contemporary understandings of the past or contemporary viewpoints and conditions shaped through a shared use of historical mythologies. As Jason Begy has argued, cultural memory depends on communication and contemporary media. Jason Begy, "Board Games and the Construction of Cultural Memory," *Games and Culture* 12, nos. 7–8 (2015): 718–738.
- 37 For a recent media studies–based examination of board games, see Paul Booth, *Board Games as Media* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2021).
- 38 Jeremy Antley, "Games and Historical Narratives," *Journal of Digital Humanities* 1, no. 2 (2012): 40.

- 39 Pat Harrigan and Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, "Editors' Introduction," in *Zones of Control: Perspectives on Wargaming*, ed. Pat Harrigan and Matthew G. Kirschenbaum (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), xviii.
- 40 Linda N. Groat and Marta Brković Dodig, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Games in Architecture and Urban Planning: Tools for Design, Teaching, and Research* (New York: Routledge, 2020).
- 41 Maurice Suckling, "Board with Meaning: Reflections on Game Design and Historiography," *CEA Critic* 79, no. 1 (2017): 119.
- 42 Suckling, "Board with Meaning," 111.
- 43 Suckling, 111.
- 44 Maurice Suckling and Jeremy Antley have noted how the immensely popular board game, *Twilight Struggle* (2005), for example, leaves unchallenged many basic (Western) assumptions about the Cold War. Suckling, "Board with Meaning," 113; Jeremy Antley, "Going beyond the Textual in History," *Journal of Digital Humanities* 1, no. 2 (2012): 57–63.
- 45 Joshua Daniel-Wariya, "Rhetorical Strategy and Creative Methodology: Revisiting *Homo Ludens*," *Games and Culture* 14, no. 6 (2019): 626.
- 46 Seasoned wargamers, particularly those who play complex, multihour (or multiday) detailed simulations, refer to themselves as "grogards," a Napoleonic-era French term for old soldiers. See the Consimworld.com website and its forums as well as essays in Harrigan and Kirschenbaum, *Zones of Control*.
- 47 Amy Kurzweil and Ellis Rosen, "The Hidden Moral Lessons in Your Favorite Childhood Games," *New Yorker*, September 28, 2018, accessed August 2, 2021, <https://www.newyorker.com/humor/daily-shouts/the-hidden-moral-lessons-in-your-favorite-childhood-games>.
- 48 Samantha Grossman, "You Have to Play a Board Game Before You Can Get a Driver's License in Sierra Leone," *Time*, October 21, 2013, accessed August 2, 2021, <https://newsfeed.time.com/2013/10/21/you-have-to-play-a-board-game-before-you-can-get-a-drivers-license-in-sierra-leone/>.
- 49 John T. Edmunds, "The Urban Renewal 'Game': A New Teaching Aid," *HUD Challenge* (October 1972): 18–19.
- 50 Milton Bradley, "Games and Amusements," *Good Housekeeping* 22, no. 1 (1896): 16.
- 51 Game rule book, *Public Assistance*, courtesy of the Strong National Museum of Play, Rochester, New York.
- 52 According to one such publication, "Some psychologists have announced that men, after all, are just oversized boys, but still retaining the boy's likes and dislikes, including a definite preference for toys. . . . In arranging store displays, this should be kept in mind and those items of particular appeal to men should be placed where they are sure to be seen." W. R. Harrison, "I'm in Love with a Wonderful Guy," *Playthings* 68, no. 8 (1950): 105. Concerns about the "boy-man" who refuses to grow up continue to the present. One marker of the boy-man's supposed immaturity is his enduring desire to play games, especially video games; see Gary S. Cross, *Men to Boys: The Making of Modern Immaturity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).
- 53 Today Eurogames consistently list the game's designer on the box top (the majority are still male). For recent scholarship on identity, subjectivity, and board games, see Terri Toles Patkin, *Who's in the Game? Identity and Intersectionality in Classic Board Games* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2020). For a period perspective on the male toy-buying consumer, see Harrison, "I'm in Love with a Wonderful Guy," 105.



54 Game board and component print files were available for free download from the publisher's website, accessed September 6, 2021, <https://www.daysofwonder.com/tickettoride/en/stay-at-home/>.

### **Player TV: Board Games in TV Land**

- 1 Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1984), 68.
- 2 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
- 3 Meaghan Morse, "An Ontology of Everyday Distraction: The Freeway, the Mall, and Television," in *Logics of Television*, ed. Patricia Mellencamp (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 193–221.
- 4 Gaston Bachelard, "Miniature," in *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon, 1964), 148–182; Stewart, *On Longing*, 1984.

### **Scrabble and the Image of the (Out-of-Work) Architect**

- 1 Stefan Fatsis, "The Architect Who Invented Scrabble—Alfred Butts Counted Letters, Balanced Risk and Reward to Create Hit Word Game," *Wall Street Journal*, Eastern edition, June 28, 2001, B1.
- 2 Andrew Saint, *The Image of the Architect* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983).
- 3 George Barnett Johnston, *Drafting Culture: A Social History of Architectural Graphic Standards* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008).
- 4 Andrew Shanken, "Breaking the Taboo: Architects and Advertising in Depression and War," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 69, no. 3 (September 2010): 406–429.
- 5 Ben Heintz, "When the Inventor of Scrabble Came to Town," *Saint Albans Messenger*, December 26, 2019, para. 18.
- 6 Sarah Kershaw, "Rewriting the Story of Scrabble," *New York Times*, October 1, 1995, CY11.
- 7 These personal papers are regularly referenced in newspaper articles. For instance, Fatsis, "The Architect Who Invented Scrabble," para. 10.
- 8 Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).
- 9 Underground Workshop, "Three Shifts at the Scrabble Factory: The Inventor," part 1 of 3, VTDigger.org, accessed June 24, 2021, <https://vtdigger.org/2019/12/26/three-shifts-at-the-scrabble-factory-the-inventor/>.

### **The Domestic Bliss of Life**

- 1 Jimmy Stamp, "The Minivan Turns 30: Celebrate the Birthday of the Iconic Car That Changed the Way Families Drove," *Smithsonian*, March 26, 2013, accessed July 24, 2021, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/the-minivan-turns-30-9706409/>.

### **Skyscraper: Replaying Epic Battles in City Planning**

- 1 Robert Fishman, "The Death and the Life of American Regional Planning," in *Reflections on Regionalism*, ed. Bruce Katz (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2000), 107–126; Emily Talen, "Beyond the Front Porch: Regionalist Ideals in the New Urbanist Movement," *Journal of Planning History* 7, no. 1 (February 2008): 20–47.

- 2 Talen, "Beyond the Front Porch," 20–47; Robert F. Young and Pierre Clavel, "Planning Living Cities: Patrick Geddes' Legacy in the New Millennium," *Landscape and Urban Planning* 166 (October 2017): 1–3.
- 3 Ebenezer Howard and Frederic J. Osborn, *Garden Cities of To-morrow* (1902; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001).
- 4 Ralph Steiner and Willard Van Dyke, *The City*, 1939, film, available on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OaTn36YjLf8>.
- 5 Clarence S. Stein, "Dinosaur Cities," *The Survey* 59 (May 1925): 134–138.
- 6 Mary Pilon, *The Monopolists: Obsession, Fury, and the Scandal behind the World's Favorite Board Game* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 19.

### **From Monopoly to Taudis-Poly**

- 1 Taudis-Poly press release, March 29, 2019, accessed March 15, 2021, <http://didac-researches.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/communiqué-de-presse-Taudis-Poly.pdf>.
  - 2 "Dans le centre-ville de Marseille, 13 % de l'habitat est indigne," *Le Monde*, November 6, 2018, accessed May 12, 2021, [https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2018/11/06/habitat-indigne-dans-le-centre-ville-de-marseille-comment-en-est-on-arrive-la\\_5379674\\_3224.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2018/11/06/habitat-indigne-dans-le-centre-ville-de-marseille-comment-en-est-on-arrive-la_5379674_3224.html).
  - 3 Pharmacology is a concept that stipulates both poison and remedy. Drawing on Jacques Derrida's essay "Plato's Pharmacy," which proposed that writing is a *pharmakon*, pharmacology was theorized and broadened by Bernard Stiegler, who suggested a political analysis of, and intervention in, exploitative capitalist systems and destructive tendencies of consumerist societies. Pharmacology informs the ethics and politics of care.
  - 4 *Housing Pharmacology* was part of *Traits d'union.s*, the thirteenth edition of Manifesta, the European Nomadic Biennial. It was curated by Katerina Chuchalina, Stefan Kalmár, and Alya Sebtí and took place in various locations in Marseille between August 8 and November 29, 2020. See <https://manifesta13.org/>.
- On all transcribed conversations in French and English, see Samia Henni, "Housing Pharmacology," 2020, [https://samiahenni.com/IMG/Pharmacologie\\_Samia\\_Henni.pdf](https://samiahenni.com/IMG/Pharmacologie_Samia_Henni.pdf).
- 5 Henni, "Housing Pharmacology," 19.
  - 6 Henni, 119.

### **Hostile Architecture: Burgle Bros., Interdiction, and Spatial Politics**

- 1 Steven Flusty, *Building Paranoia: The Proliferation of Interdictory Space and the Erosion of Spatial Justice* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Forum for Architecture and Urban Design, 1994), 12.
- 2 In addition to the work of James Petty and Haley Starolis, see Mike Davis, "Fortress Los Angeles: The Militarisation of Urban Space," in *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space*, ed. Michael Sorkin (New York: Noonday, 1992).
- 3 Rowan Tulloch, "A Man Chooses, a Slave Obeys: Agency, Interactivity and Freedom in Video Gaming," *Journal of Gaming and Virtual Worlds* 2, no. 1 (2010): 27–38.

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- 1 David W. Dunlap, "Fake Window Decals Pulled in Favor of Real Occupants," *New York Times*, July 12, 1989, B2; Robert D. McFadden, "Derelict Tenements in the Bronx to Get Fake Lived-In Look," *New York Times*, 1983, A1, 29.

2 Non-Breaking Space (pseudonym), interview by author, March 4, 2022; Jill Jonnes, *South Bronx Rising: The Rise, Fall, and Resurrection of an American City* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002).

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4 Hilary Ballon and Kenneth T. Jackson, eds., *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007); James Michael Buckley, "Just Fieldwork: Exploring the Vernacular in the African American Community in Portland, Oregon's, Albina District," *Future Anterior* 17, no. 2 (2020): 1–14; "A Public History of 35W," accessed April 4, 2022, <https://humantoll35w.org>. See also the Congress for New Urbanism's 2021 report "Freeways without Futures," accessed April 4, 2022, <https://www.cnu.org/highways-boulevards/freeways-without-futures/2021>.

### Ground Rules: Strategic Abstraction in Terrace

1 "Terrace Inventors' Page," accessed June 24, 2021, <https://web.archive.org/web/20060430134205/http://www.terracegames.com/inventors.html>.

2 "History of Terrace," accessed June 24, 2021, <https://web.archive.org/web/20060430134153/http://www.terracegames.com/history.html>.

3 See "Frank Stella—1972," YouTube, accessed June 24, 2021, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cN\\_rRCfRdmQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cN_rRCfRdmQ).

4 See J. Mark Thompson, "Defining the Abstract," *Games Journal*, July 2000, accessed June 24, 2021, <http://www.thegamesjournal.com/articles/DefiningtheAbstract.shtml>.

5 "Terrace," Memory Alpha, Fandom, accessed June 24, 2021, <https://memory-alpha.fandom.com/wiki/Terrace>.

6 *Terrace Times*, Winter 1997, included in the *Terrace* 6 × 6 game box.

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1 Raye C. Ringholz, *Uranium Frenzy: Boom and Bust on the Colorado Plateau* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989), 73.

2 Sianne Ngai, *Theory of the Gimmick: Aesthetic Judgment and Capitalist Form* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2020), 1–3.

3 Traci Brynne Voyles, *Wastelanding: Legacies of Uranium Mining in Navajo Country* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), xii.

4 Robert Johnson, *Romancing the Atom: Nuclear Infatuation from the Radium Girls to Fukushima* (Oxford: Praeger, 2012), 95.

### Historiography in Space: Approaches in Commercial Wargame Board Design

1 Jon Peterson, "A Game Out of All Proportions: How a Hobby Miniaturized War," in *Zones of Control: Perspectives on Wargaming*, ed. Pat Harrigan and Matthew G. Kirschenbaum (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), 3–31.

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### Pillars of the Earth: Building a Fantasy

1 Georges Duby, *Rural Economy and Country Life in the Medieval West*, trans. Cynthia Postan (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1968).



2 The authoritative text on Gothic construction remains John Fitchen, *The Construction of Gothic Cathedrals: A Study of Medieval Vault Erection* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

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5 Robert Bork, ed., *De re metallica: The Uses of Metal in the Middle Ages* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2005).

### **Adventures in Disney's Lands: Theme Park-Themed Games**

1 Karal Ann Marling, *Designing Disney's Theme Parks: The Architecture of Reassurance* (Montreal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1997).

### **Masterpiece: Putting the Museum on Auction**

1 Darrow reworked Lizzie Magie's original game and eventually sold it to Parker Brothers. The prototype for his circular board (which was subsequently produced on oilcloth) is now owned by the Strong National Museum of Play in Rochester, New York, [onlinecollection.museumofplay.org/ArgusNet/Portal/Public.aspx](http://onlinecollection.museumofplay.org/ArgusNet/Portal/Public.aspx).

2 Philip E. Orbanes, *The Game Makers: The Story of Parker Brothers from Tiddledy Winks to Trivial Pursuit* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2004), 162–163.

3 Parker Brothers, *Masterpiece* board game commercial, 1970, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2emMbF\\_bSDA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2emMbF_bSDA).

4 *Going Once: 250 Years of Culture, Taste and Collecting at Christie's* (London: Phaidon, 2016), 404.

5 Malcolm Goldstein, *Landscape with Figures: A History of Art Dealing in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 182–183; John Canaday, "Metropolitan Was Buyer of \$5.5-Million Velazquez," *New York Times*, May 13, 1971, 1.

6 Goldstein, *Landscape with Figures*, 184–185.

7 Neil Harris, *Capital Culture: J. Carter Brown, the National Gallery of Art, and the Reinvention of the Museum Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 189–218.

8 Orbanes, *The Game Makers*, 163; Mary Pilon, *The Monopolists: Obsession, Fury, and the Scandal behind the World's Favorite Board Game* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 215.

### **Hanging Out at the Food Court with *Electronic Mall Madness***

1 Interestingly, 1989 was the same year that construction began on the Mall of America (six miles from Southdale Center and still the largest indoor shopping center in the United States).

2 An initial iteration in 1988, *Mall Madness*, lacked the elaborate detail of succeeding editions. Small changes were made between the 1989 and 2004 versions, such as the

introduction of the food court and food tokens. The game was reimplemented in 2008 and 2011 with a licensed Hannah Montana theme and then a pet shop theme, respectively.

3 The Sherman Oaks [California] Galleria served as the location for the mall exterior in *Valley Girl* and the interior of the mall in *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*.

4 For “dead malls,” see [www.deadmalls.com](http://www.deadmalls.com). For recent redevelopment projects and proposals, see June Williamson and Ellen Dunham-Jones, *Case Studies in Retrofitting Suburbia: Urban Design Strategies for Urgent Challenges* (New York: Wiley, 2021), esp. “Boosting Small Business by Reinhabiting Dead Retail” and “Housing Choices: Aging-in-Community at Malls, Strip Centers, and Office Parks.”

### Trump and Racialized Capitalism

1 Joan Didion, “New York: Sentimental Journeys,” *New York Review*, January 17, 1991, accessed February 28, 2022, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1991/01/17/new-york-sentimental-journeys/>.

2 Jonathan Mahler and Steve Eder, “‘No Vacancies’ for Blacks: How Donald Trump Got His Start, and Was First Accused of Bias,” *New York Times*, August 27, 2016.

3 Andrea Bernstein, *American Oligarchs: The Kushners, the Trumps, and the Marriage of Money and Power* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2020), 175–177.

### The National Mind as a Prison: Fortress America

1 James Corner, “The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention,” in *Mappings*, ed. Denis Cosgrove (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), 250.

2 Cosgrove, *Mappings*, 9.

3 Paul Johnson, “Europe and the Reagan Years,” *Foreign Affairs* 68, no. 1 (1988–1989): 28–38.

4 Ronald Reagan, “Remarks at the Annual Convention of the American Bar Association,” DAR Constitution Hall, July 8, 1985, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/259665>.

5 William Greider, *Fortress America: The American Military and the Consequences of Peace* (New York: PublicAffairs, 1998), xiii.

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7 James Chace and Caleb Carr, *America Invulnerable: The Quest for Absolute Security from 1812 to Star Wars* (New York: Summit Books, 1988), 13; see also Elaine Tyler May, *Fortress America: How We Embraced Fear and Abandoned Democracy* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 10.

8 Cosgrove, *Mappings*, 15.

### Risk Analysis: Mapping Conquest on the Game Board

1 Lamorisse was an Academy Award–winning filmmaker best known for his 1956 *Le ballon rouge* (*The Red Balloon*).

### Empire Preference: Interwar British Empire Trade Games

1 *The Game of British Empire, or, Trading with the Colonies*, Robert Brothier, ca. 1925–1930, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, Ballam Collection, Games, Roberts (7).

- 2 *Empire Preference*, Geographia Ltd., ca. 1930, London, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, Ballam Collection, Games, 1930s (38).
- 3 Frank Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation: Commerce, Consumption, and Civil Society in Modern Britain* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 231–236.
- 4 Stephen Constantine, "'Bringing the Empire Alive': The Empire Marketing Board and Imperial Propaganda, 1926–33," in *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, ed. by John M. MacKenzie (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1986), 212.
- 5 John M. MacKenzie, "'In Touch with the Infinite': The BBC and the Empire, 1923–53," in MacKenzie, *Imperialism and Popular Culture*.

### **Pandemic: When the Abstract Becomes Concrete**

- 1 José P. Zagal, Jochen Rick, and Idris Hsi, "Collaborative Games: Lessons Learned from Board Games," *Simulation and Gaming* 37, no. 1 (2006): 24–40.
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- 4 George E. P. Box, "Robustness in the Strategy of Scientific Model Building," in *Robustness in Statistics: Proceedings of a Workshop*, ed. Robert L. Launer and Graham N. Wilkinson (New York: Academic Press, 1979), 201–236. Box's saying, which he elaborated on in other publications, was brought to our attention by Volko Ruhnke in his presentation "How to Design a COIN Wargame," Georgetown University Wargaming Society, video, 1:58:44, accessed April 26, 2022, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FbFLZE\\_NTRI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FbFLZE_NTRI).
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- 9 "Global Gaming Industry Value Now Exceeds \$300 Billion, New Accenture Report Finds," April 29, 2021, accessed August 2, 2021, <https://newsroom.accenture.com/news/global-gaming-industry-value-now-exceeds-300-billion-new-accenture-report-finds.htm>. Scholars have recognized and paid considerable attention to connections between digital games, architecture, and spatial theory. See, e.g., Friedrich von Borries, Steffen P. Walz, and Matthias Böttger, eds., *Space Time Play: Computer Games, Architecture, and Urbanism; The Next Level* (Boston: Springer, 2007); Steffen P. Walz, *Toward a Ludic Architecture: The Space of Play and Games* (ETC Press, 2010).
- 10 Originating with the game *Carcassonne*, "meeple" is a blending of "me" and "people" that has become a common term for a board game player's token, especially when it takes a human form.
- 11 The opportunities and dangers of the gamified world have concerned scholars for decades. See, e.g., Steffen P. Walz and Sebastian Deterding, eds., *The Gameful World: Approaches, Issues, Applications* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014).
- 12 Bart Simon states that "the unseriousness, baseness, and pointlessness of so-called low cultures has often been somewhat critical for the political mobilization and resistant practices of disenfranchised subjects. It can be the unseriousness associated with, and appropriated by, these subjects that provides them with the freedom of motion in which to act within (and against) a dominant system." Bart Simon, "Unserious," *Games and Culture* 12, no. 6 (2016): 615.
- 13 For additional discussions of this subject, see Cornel Borit, Melania Borit, and Petter Olsen, "Representations of Colonialism in Three Popular, Modern Board Games: Puerto Rico, Struggle of Empires, and Archipelago," *Open Library of Humanities* 4, no. 1 (2018); Bruno Faidutti, "Postcolonial Catan," *Analog Game Studies* 2 (2017): 3–34.



14 Jon Bolding, "A Cancelled Board Game Revealed How Colonialism Inspires and Haunts Games," *Vice*, April 12, 2019, accessed April 29, 2022, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/vb9gd9/a-cancelled-board-game-revealed-how-colonialism-inspires-and-haunts-games>. In the article, Bolding mentions several recent games, including some by GMT, that present more nuanced and critical representations of historical events, especially those involving conquest and the experience of marginalized populations. Bolding also notes gamers' growing demand for, "More understanding of power dynamics, more engagement with the historical theme, and a more intellectual bent when dealing with complex issues."

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Figure 10.1: Charles Darrow's 1933 *Monopoly* prototype.



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Figure 11.1: Chad Randl (right) playing (and likely losing) *Chutes and Ladders* with a childhood friend ca. 1975.

# Contributor Biographies

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